

**Including English Language Learners with
Disabilities in Large-Scale Assessments:
A Case Study of Linguistically-Diverse
Populations**



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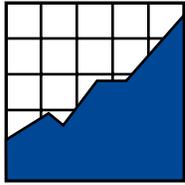
Including English Language Learners with Disabilities in Large-Scale Assessments: A Case Study of Linguistically-Diverse Populations

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**N A T I O N A L
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O U T C O M E S**

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Overview

The advent of standards-based reform during the past 10 years has ushered in a variety of challenges for policymakers and practitioners alike. Such concerns were accentuated by the legislative mandates of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act which required year-to-year academic performance to be measured by states' standards-based large-scale assessments for all subgroups of students in U.S. schools. While schools and their staff generally support the theory of action that underlies initiatives like NCLB, such as that explicated in *Testing, Teaching, and Learning* (Elmore & Rothman, 1999), it is still a challenge to provide instruction based on challenging, grade-level content standards. In addition, there is often a concern that some students, especially those with disabilities or limited English proficiency, may not be capable of achieving the academic content deemed appropriate for the grades in which they are enrolled in school. It is also suggested that these students are not able to fully participate in large-scale assessments that were designed for their peers. While concerns have been raised for students with disabilities as a subgroup and English language learners (ELLs) as a subgroup for some time, it is only recently that including students with both disabilities and English learning challenges in states' large-scale assessment and accountability programs have been considered.

With the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and NCLB, both of which clearly required that students with disabilities be included in state assessments, states are making progress toward including all students in their standards-based testing. Rates of participation for students with disabilities and English language learners have been improving over time (Thompson & Thurlow, 2003). However, there are few data that can demonstrate improved academic results for ELLs with disabilities. In fact, there are few sources of public data that report results for these students (Albus & Thurlow, 2005). Only recently, ELLs with disabilities have begun to receive marginal attention in the literature (Minnema, Thurlow, Anderson, & Stone, 2005). The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) has for the past four years conducted research on large-scale assessment and instructional issues for ELLs with disabilities, but neither NCEO's research nor any other research study has yet described large-scale assessment experiences at the local school level for English language learners with disabilities.

This study was designed, in part, to clarify some of the issues that surround including English language learners in states' large-scale assessment programs. Specifically, we gathered practical information at the local school level to understand these students' large-scale assessment experiences from a variety of perspectives, to describe the characteristics of ELLs with disabilities as well as the characteristics of their schools, and to make known the level of awareness that students and their families have about large-scale assessments.

State and Local Context

To understand the school and students included in this study, it is helpful to know the context and characteristics of the state and the district in which the study took place. The state was a large southern state with a total estimated population of 17,019,068 in 2003. The breakdown by ethnicity was 65.4% White not of Hispanic/Latino origin, 16.8% of Hispanic or Latino origin, 14.6% Black/African American, 1.7% Asian, 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 3.0% reporting some other race, and 2.4% reporting two or more races. Across these subgroups, 16.7% (n = 2,670,794) were foreign born. The regions in which these individuals were born were Latin America (72.8%, a total of 1,943,781), Europe (13.3%, n = 355,427), Asia (8.7%, n = 231,976), Africa (1.3%, n = 34,495), Northern America excluding the United States (3.8%, n = 100,158), and Oceania (0.2%, n = 4,957). Of the 15,043,603 individuals in this state who are five years old or older, 23.1% (n = 3,473,864) spoke a language other than English at home. In 2003, a total of 397,758 students, or 9.6% of school age individuals (ages 3 through 21 years) received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2003). All demographic information was gained from the 2000 Census unless otherwise indicated (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

The School District

The district was an urban school district located in a large metropolitan area in the southern region of the state. The district served approximately 365,000 students from Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 in a total of 432 school buildings. Students attending school in this district were predominately of Hispanic or Latino origin (58%), Black (29%), or White (10%). About 1% of the students were Asian, and less than 1% were American Indian or Multi-Racial. About 17% of students in the district were classified as limited English proficient, speaking a total of 106 different languages. In addition, 12% of the students in the district received special education services. A total of 64% of district students qualified for the federally funded free or reduced price lunch program.

Large-Scale Assessment Program

The assessment program for this state helps track student performance based on the state's content standards. Students in grades 3 through 10 take a standards-based assessment in math and reading. A writing test is administered in grades 4, 8, and 10 and a science test is administered in grades 5, 8, and 11. The assessment system is considered high-stakes because all high school students must pass the grade 10 test in reading and math in order to graduate, and all grade 3 students who score at level 1 on the reading test must repeat third grade. Reporting of the test results uses a 5-point scale of proficiency, with level 1 indicating the lowest demonstrated

proficiency level and level 5 indicating the highest. The writing test is scored on a scale of 1-6. The state's Department of Education rates each school using a letter grade (A-F); the rating is based on overall student performance, the percentage of eligible students who took the test, and evidence of student progress in reading and math.

The Elementary Schools

The first elementary school (School 1) serves approximately 1,300 students in Pre-Kindergarten through grade 5. The school offers an extensive, holistic, dual-language instructional program. Through this program, all students receive instruction in language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics in English and Spanish. Visual arts, music, and physical education classes are taught in English. The school is located in a special neighborhood of the metropolitan area where the majority of the students (87%) are of Hispanic or Latino origin, while 9% are White, 1% are Black, and 2% are classified as Asian/Multi-racial. The majority of students (71%) participate in the free or reduced price lunch program. Approximately 22% of the student body is limited English proficient. In 2004–2005, School 1 was ranked an “A” school.

The other elementary school (School 2) educates approximately 1,200 students in Pre-Kindergarten through grade 5. The majority of the students are of Hispanic or Latino origin (91%), 4% of the students are Black, 4% are White, and less than 1% are Asian or Multi-Racial. Ninety percent of the students qualify for the free or reduced price lunch program, and 52% are classified as limited English proficient. School 2 was ranked an “A” school in 2004–2005.

The Middle School

School 3 serves approximately 2,100 students in grades 6 through 8. The students are predominately of Hispanic or Latino origin (80%), followed by Black (12%) and White (7%). Less than 1% are Asian or Multi-Racial. About 76% of the student body qualifies for free or reduced price lunch and about 16% are classified as limited English proficient. In 2004–2005, School 3 was ranked a “C” school.

The High School

School 4 serves approximately 2,300 students in grades 9 through 12. The school is located in another of the metropolitan area's special neighborhoods, and serves predominately Black students (95%). A small portion of the students are Hispanic (5%), and less than 1% are White, Asian, or Multi-Racial. Approximately 63% of the student body qualifies for free or reduced price lunches and 19% are classified as limited English proficient. School 4 was ranked an “F” school in 2004–2005.

Method

Research Questions

We addressed four research questions in our study:

- 1) What perceptions do educators, parents, and students have about the experiences of English language learners with disabilities who participate in large-scale assessments?
- 2) How are English language learners with disabilities performing in large-scale assessments?
- 3) How are participation decisions made to test English language learners with disabilities in large-scale assessments?
- 4) What are the characteristics of schools that test English language learners with disabilities in large-scale assessments?

Research Design

Our collective case study research design, in which one school is defined as a case, used a mixed method approach to collect quantitative and qualitative data from four sources of data. Data were collected on site in the four schools as well as district offices.

Sample

Using a purposive sample, we included English language learners with disabilities ($n = 27$), their parents ($n = 27$), school level educators and administrators ($n = 60$), and district level administrators ($n = 2$). The schools from which our sample was drawn were recruited by the district's Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and the Program Specialist of Special Education/English Language Learners. Within each school, one staff member served as a contact person for the study. Their primary responsibilities were to recruit parents and students for the face-to-face interviews and help with the administration of the educator surveys. All interview participants received a gift card from a department store as a thank you for their time invested in our research activities.

Instruments

We used a variety of self-developed data collection instruments that included a written survey, interview protocols, and a document review data collection sheet (see the Appendix for copies of the survey and interview protocols).

Procedures

The written surveys were distributed in three ways. In School 1, we mailed the surveys to the contact person who distributed and collected them over the course of a month. In School 2, the surveys were placed in teachers' school mailboxes with a request to return the surveys to the contact person at that school by the end of that week. Surveys were not distributed in School 3 at the school's request. In School 4, the surveys were given to the contact person at the school to distribute and then collect from teachers. After collecting all the completed surveys from each school, the contact person at each school returned the surveys to us via a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope.

Face-to-face interviews with parents were conducted at school in either small groups or individually depending on the participants' preferences. Each interview was recorded for subsequent transcription and data analysis. An English speaking researcher conducted all of the interviews with or without an interpreter. All of the parent interviews were conducted in the parent's self-reported dominant language: English, Spanish, or Haitian-Creole. When the parent's dominant language was Spanish, a bilingual researcher of Latino origin interpreted for the English-speaking researcher and the parent. When the parent's dominant language was Haitian-Creole, a Haitian bilingual district employee interpreted for the English-speaking researcher and the parent. One researcher interviewed the students in School 4 in English during noninstructional time. Since the student interview responses were shorter than the parent narrative data, these interviews were not recorded. Instead, student responses were written down during the interviews. Depending on the size of the group, parent interviews required from 30 to 45 minutes to complete with individual interviews requiring less time. Student interviews were typically less than 10 minutes in duration.

Educator interviews were conducted via telephone due to time constraints of the study. Educators were identified through each school's contact person. All educator interviews were conducted in English by one researcher. Each interview was recorded to be transcribed at a later date and lasted approximately 30–45 minutes.

Two researchers collected data for the document review of students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and cumulative files. A common data collection sheet was used across schools, collecting data on a number of variables, including English language services (e.g., description of services, language assessment scores), special education services (e.g., type of services, content areas, language of instruction), country of origin, time in the U.S., prior school history, attendance, disciplinary issues, and grades. The data source (e.g., IEP, cumulative file) was also indicated for each variable.

Data Analysis

To analyze our narrative data, we first transcribed all English portions of the educator and parent interviews verbatim. For the Spanish portions of our parent interviews, the bilingual researcher transcribed the Spanish data and then translated these data to English. For the Haitian-Creole portions of our parent interviews, the Haitian bilingual school district employee transcribed the Haitian-Creole data and then translated these data to English. All narrative data were then subjected to a content analysis that yielded themes of results. Throughout the qualitative analysis process, English data were compared back to Spanish and Haitian-Creole translated data to ensure accuracy of our interpretations. We used the original Spanish and Haitian-Creole as well as the translated English for any supportive quotations taken from the parent interview data. To analyze the student interview data, we tabulated categories of responses rather than creating themes of results. We employed descriptive statistics to analyze the document review and survey data.

Results

Written Survey: Summary Across Schools

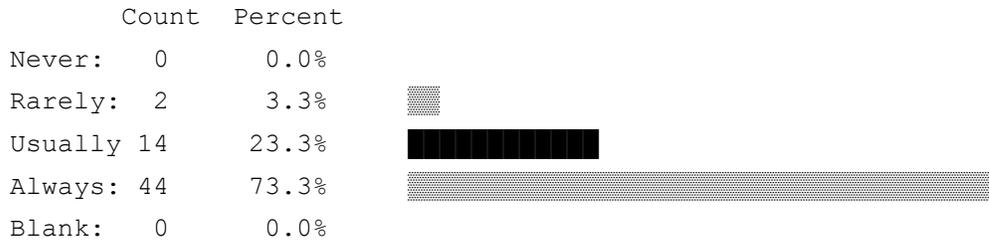
The written survey data were first compiled across Schools 1, 2, and 4 since surveys were not completed at School 3. A total of 60 ($n = 60$) teachers and administrators completed the survey. The 21 survey items that were included in analysis were organized into four categories: (1) participation-related data elements, (2) performance-related data elements, (3) student and parent-related data elements, and (4) teacher-related data elements. Each category is presented separately with summary text and figures representing the frequencies and percentages of responses reported for each item. Survey items included the proper name of the state test, but to preserve the anonymity of the district, the large-scale assessment is referred to as the “state test.” Also, the term “blank” indicates “no response” to that item.

Participation-Related Data Elements. Most of the participants indicated that English language learners with disabilities always take the state test and always use accommodations when taking the test (items 1 and 2). These accommodations are more likely to be designed for special education than for second language; 62% of the respondents indicated that these students usually or always use *only* special education accommodations to take the state tests while only 30% indicated that these students usually or always use *only* second language accommodations to take the state tests (items 3 and 4). Combining these two types of accommodations groups may be more popular than using either one alone as 71% of respondents reported that these students always or usually use *both* special education and second language accommodations (item 5). Further, most participants indicated that English language learners with disabilities hardly ever take an alternate assessment instead of the regular state test (item 6). In terms of test completion,

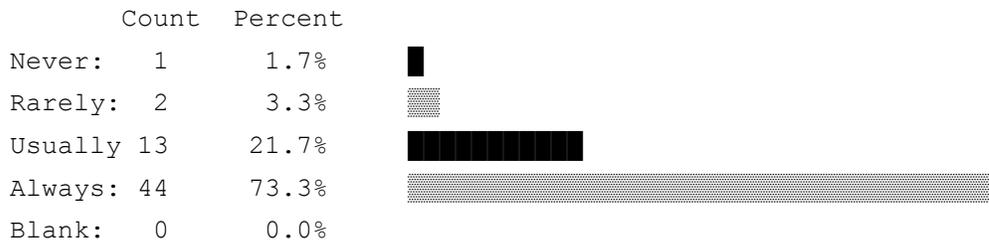
educators reported that these students typically complete *all* of the state test items, sometimes complete *about half* of the state test items, and rarely or never complete *10 or less* of the state test items (items 7–9). Results from participation-related survey items are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Participation-Related Data Elements

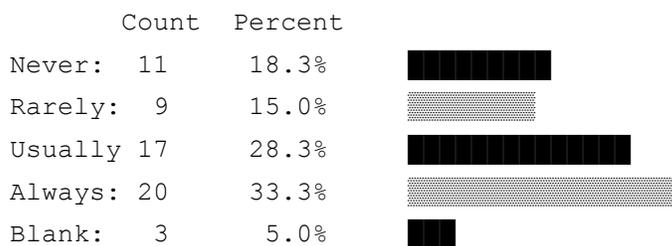
1) English language learners with disabilities take the state test.



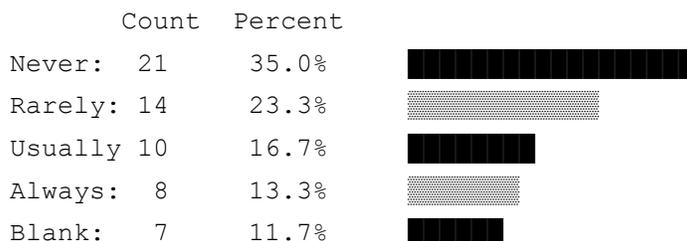
2) English language learners with disabilities use accommodations to take the state test.



3) English language learners with disabilities use *only* special education accommodations to take the state test.



4) English language learners with disabilities use *only* second language accommodations to take the state test.



5) English language learners with disabilities use *both* special education and second language accommodations to take the state test.

	Count	Percent	
Never:	5	8.3%	
Rarely:	10	16.7%	
Usually:	20	33.3%	
Always:	23	38.3%	
Blank:	2	3.3%	

6) Most of the English language learners with disabilities in my school participate in an alternate assessment to the state test.

	Count	Percent	
Never:	24	40.0%	
Rarely:	19	31.7%	
Usually:	11	18.3%	
Always:	1	1.7%	
Blank:	5	8.3%	

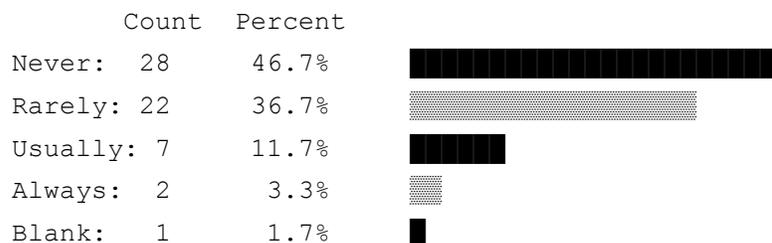
7) English language learners with disabilities complete all state test items.

	Count	Percent	
Never:	2	3.3%	
Rarely:	13	21.7%	
Usually:	26	43.3%	
Always:	19	31.7%	
Blank:	0	0.0%	

8) English language learners with disabilities complete about half of the state test items.

	Count	Percent	
Never:	15	25.0%	
Rarely:	18	30.0%	
Usually:	23	38.3%	
Always:	3	5.0%	
Blank:	1	1.7%	

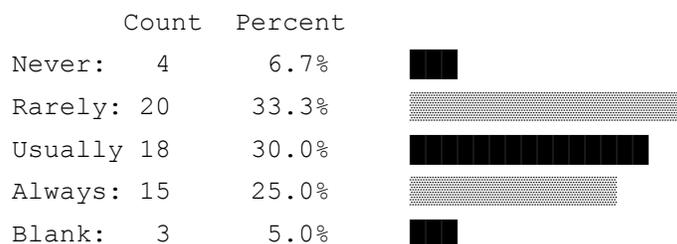
9) English language learners with disabilities complete ten or less state test items



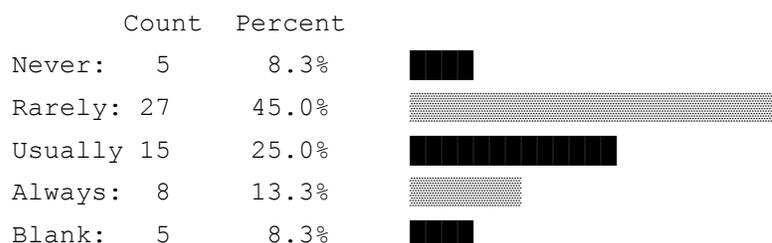
Performance-Related Data Elements. Participants had varied responses when asked whether English language learners with disabilities can demonstrate what they know and can do on the state tests. While 7% responded that these students are never able to demonstrate their abilities on the state test, the majority of respondents were more optimistic about student performance—55% responded that these students usually or always demonstrate what they know and can do on the state test (item 10). Educators responded consistently when asked about proficiency on and passing the state test, and the most frequent answer was “rarely.” These students rarely *can* be proficient and rarely *are* proficient on the state test; they rarely *can* pass and rarely *do* pass the state test (items 11–14). Results from performance-related survey items are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Performance-Related Data Elements

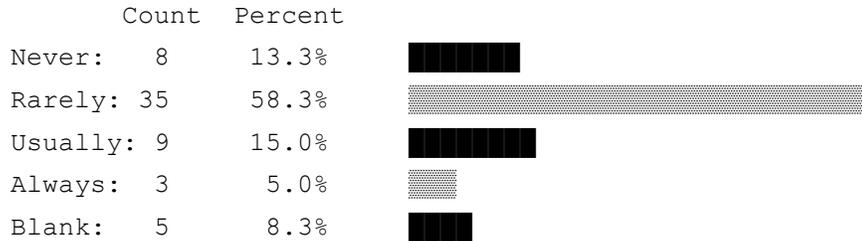
10) English language learners with disabilities can demonstrate what they know and can do on the state test.



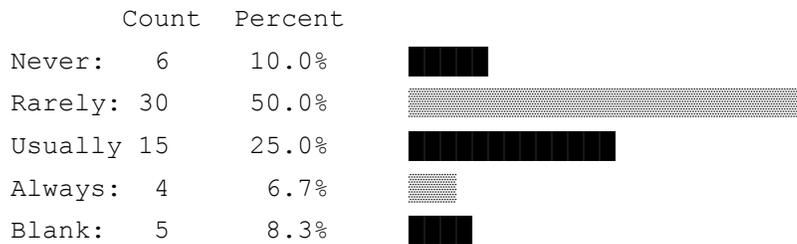
11) English language learners with disabilities can be proficient on the state test.



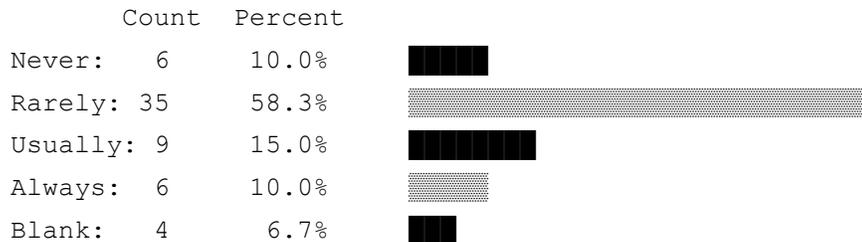
12) English language learners with disabilities are proficient on the state test.



13) English language learners with disabilities can pass high stakes tests.



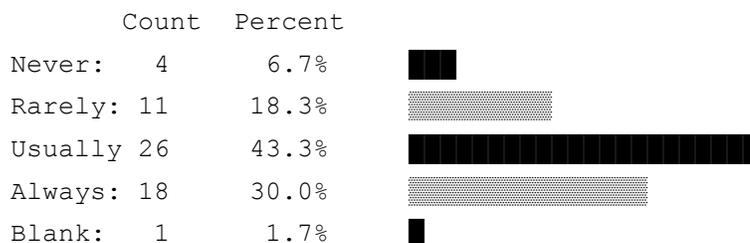
14) English language learners with disabilities do pass high stakes tests.



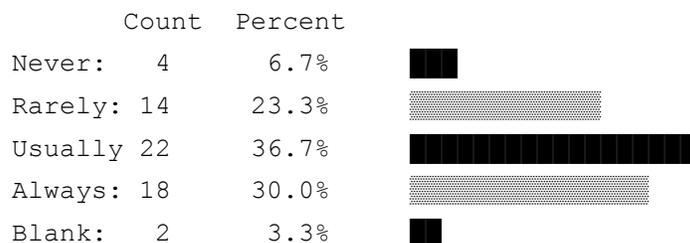
Student- and Parent-Related Data Elements. The majority of the respondents reported that parents of ELLs with disabilities typically understand what the state test is and what test accommodations are (items 15 & 16). Similarly, respondents indicated that ELLs with disabilities usually or always understand what the state test is and what test accommodations are (items 17 & 18). Results from student and parent-related survey items are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Student- and Parent-Related Data Elements

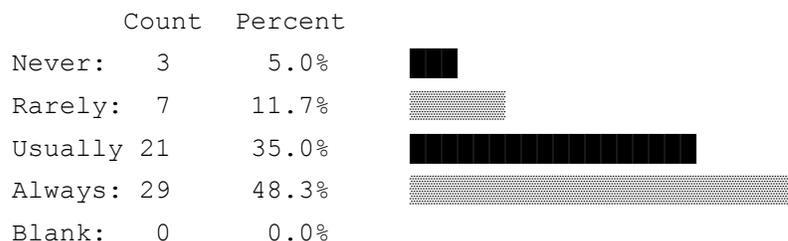
15) English language learners with disabilities' parents understand what the state test is.



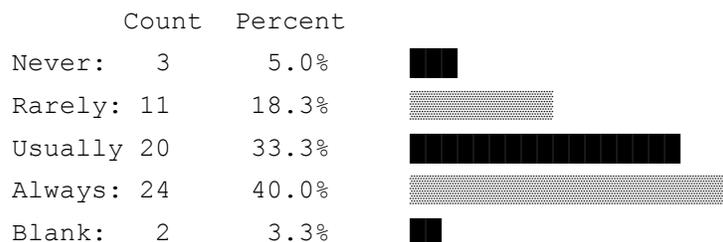
16) English language learners with disabilities' parents understand what test accommodations are.



17) English language learners with disabilities understand what the state test is.



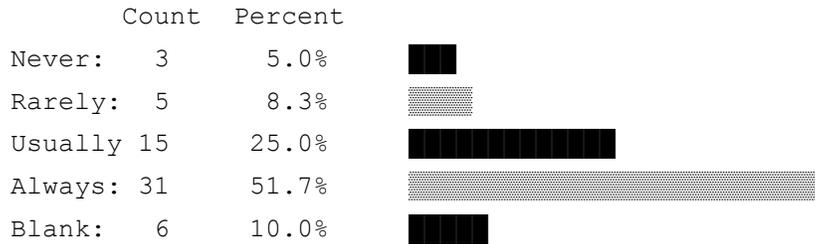
18) English language learners with disabilities understand what test accommodations are.



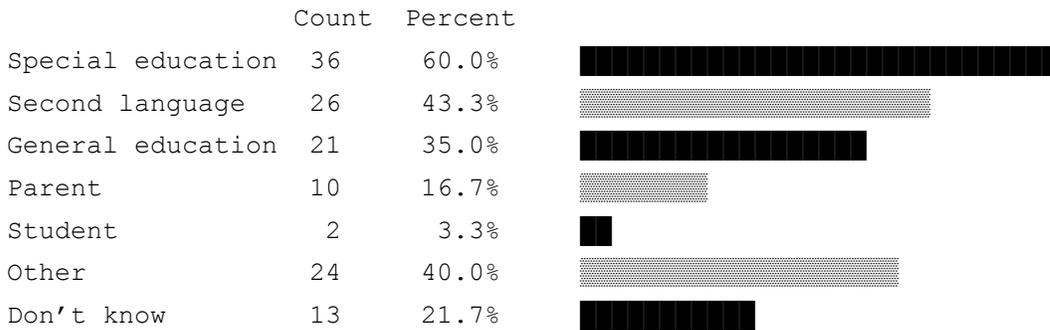
Teacher-Related Data Elements. Educators were fairly confident that there is someone with second language expertise on the IEP teams for English language learners with disabilities (item 19). Of the IEP team members, respondents reported that special education teachers primarily decide what test accommodations these students will use to take the state test, followed by second language teachers, other individuals, and general education teachers (item 20). Participants indicated that these educators are also the most likely to know the family background of ELLs with disabilities, along with the students' parents (item 21). Results from teacher-related survey items are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Teacher-Related Data Elements

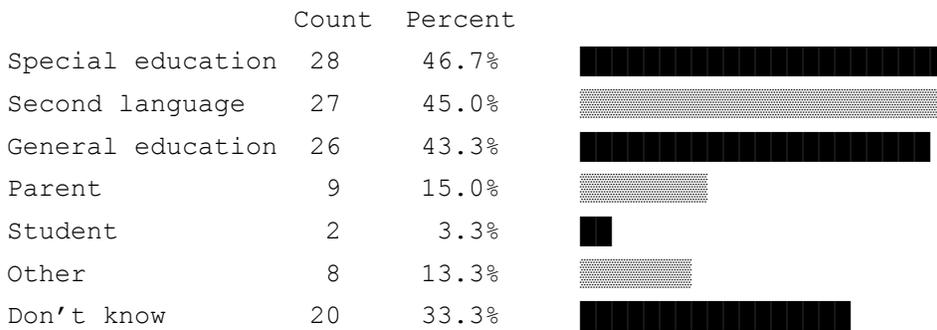
19) There is someone with second language expertise on English language learners with disabilities IEP teams in my school.



20) Who decides what test accommodations English language learners with disabilities use to take the state test?



21) In your school, who knows English language learners with disabilities family background information?



Written Survey: School Comparisons

To gain a different perspective on the data and facilitate making comparisons between schools, results are reported in this section on a school-to-school basis. The same grouping categories and reporting strategies are used here as in the previous section. A total of 18 (n = 18) educators from School 1, 30 (n = 30) educators from School 2, and 12 (n = 12) educators from School 4

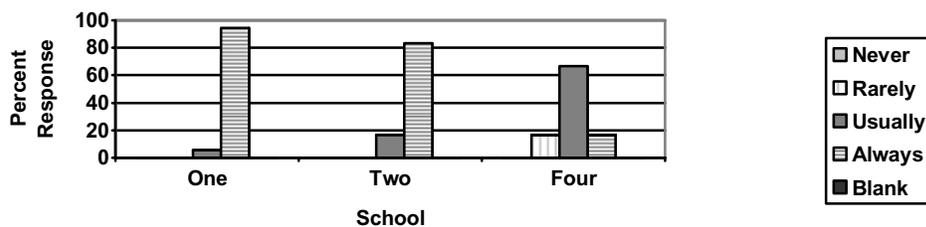
completed the survey. Again, Schools 1 and 2 are elementary schools while School 4 is a high school.

Participation-Related Data Elements. In both Schools 1 and 2, a large majority of the educators indicated that ELLs with disabilities always take the state test and always use accommodations when they take the test. In comparison, the majority of the educators at School 4 indicated that ELLs with disabilities usually take the state test and usually use accommodations when they take the test (items 1 and 2). Educators from the elementary and high school levels differed in their responses regarding the type of accommodations used. Participants from Schools 1 and 2 responded that English language learners with disabilities are more likely to use *only* special education accommodations than second language accommodations when taking the state test. The majority of the participants from School 4 responded that these students rarely use *only* special education or second language accommodations (items 3 and 4). When asked whether these students use *both* special education and second language accommodations to take the state tests, educators from School 1 overwhelmingly reported that this is always true, while educators from the other schools were less sure, and mostly responded “usually” to this item (item 5).

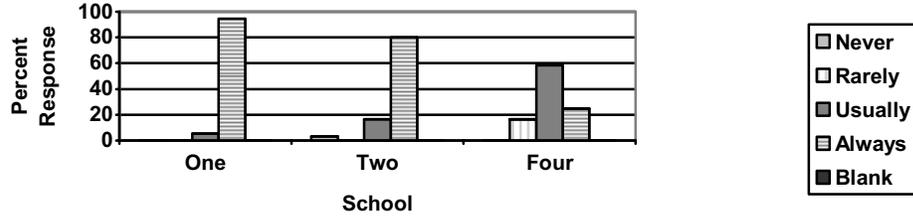
When asked about an alternate assessment, participants from School 1 responded that ELLs with disabilities hardly ever participate in an alternate assessment instead of the state test, while participants from School 2 mostly responded that these students rarely participate in an alternate assessment, and educators from School 4 responded that these students usually participate in an alternate assessment to the state test (item 6). Finally, regarding state test completion, respondents from Schools 1 and 4 reported that ELLs with disabilities usually complete *all* of the state test items while respondents from School 2 responded equally among the “always,” “usually,” and “rarely” answers (item 7). Elementary educators responded consistently to items asking whether these students complete *about half* or *10 or less* of the state test items; they responded that these students rarely, if ever, complete *about half* of the test items or complete *10 or less* items. School 4 participants continued with their “usually” response selection, indicating that these students usually complete *about half* or *10 or less* of the state test items (items 8 and 9). Results from participation-related survey items by school are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Participation-Related Data Elements

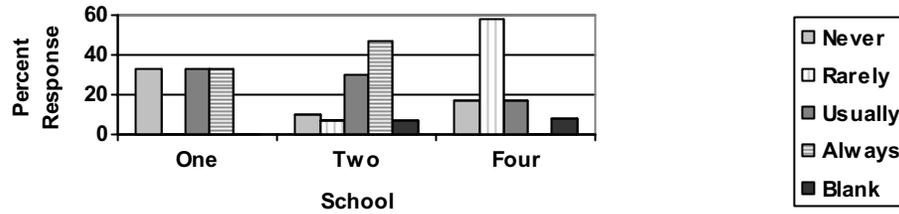
1) English language learners with disabilities take the state test.



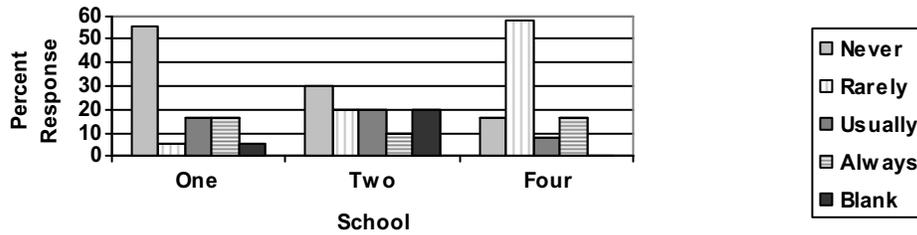
2) English language learners with disabilities use accommodations to take the state test.



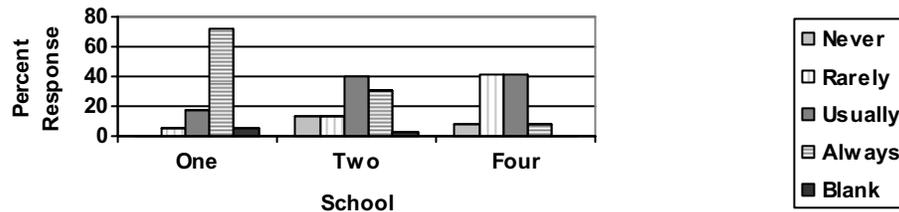
3) English language learners with disabilities use *only* special education accommodations to take the state test.



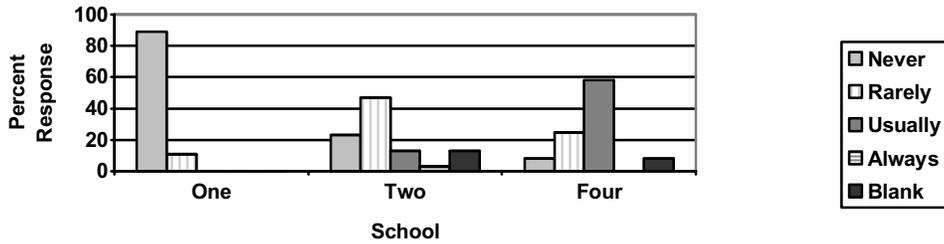
4) English language learners with disabilities use *only* second language accommodations to take the state test.



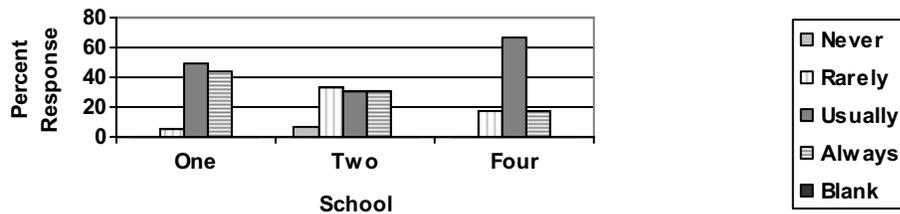
5) English language learners with disabilities use *both* special education and second language accommodations to take the state test.



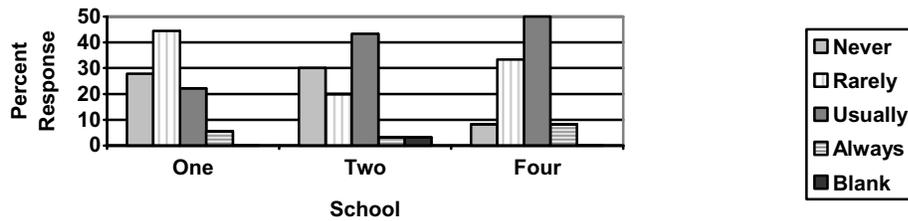
6) Most of the English language learners with disabilities in my school participate in an alternate assessment to the state test.



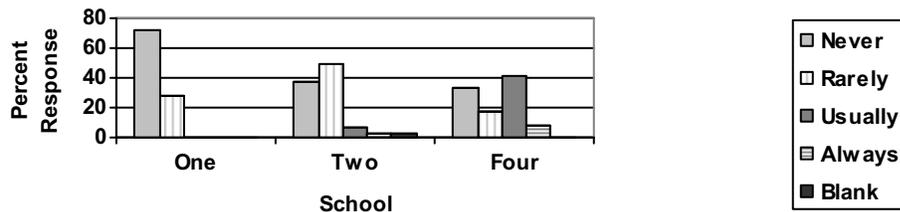
7) English language learners with disabilities complete *all* state test items.



8) English language learners with disabilities complete *about half* of all state test items.



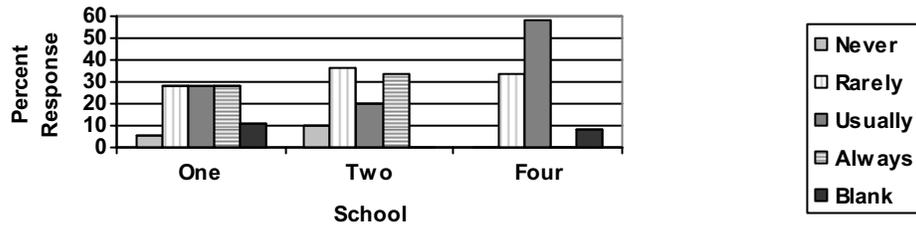
9) English language learners with disabilities complete *ten or less* of all state test items.



Performance-Related Data Elements. The elementary school participants did not converge on one answer when asked whether English language learners with disabilities can demonstrate what they know and can do on the state test; the only consistency was that “never” was infrequently selected as a response. In contrast, the majority of School 4 participants reported that these students usually demonstrate their knowledge and abilities on the state test (item 10). The most common response across all schools to the following items was “rarely.” Participants indicated that English language learners with disabilities rarely *can be* and rarely *are* proficient on the state test (items 11 and 12). Similarly, participants indicated that these students rarely *can pass* and rarely *do pass* the state test (items 13 and 14). The results from the performance-related survey items by school are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Performance-Related Data Elements

10) English language learners with disabilities can demonstrate what they know and can do on the state test.



11) English language learners with disabilities can be proficient on the state test.

AND

12) English language learners with disabilities are proficient on the state test.

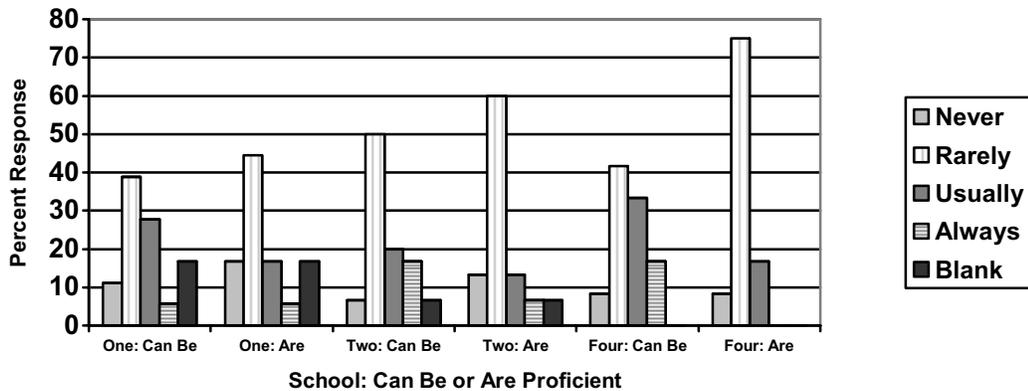
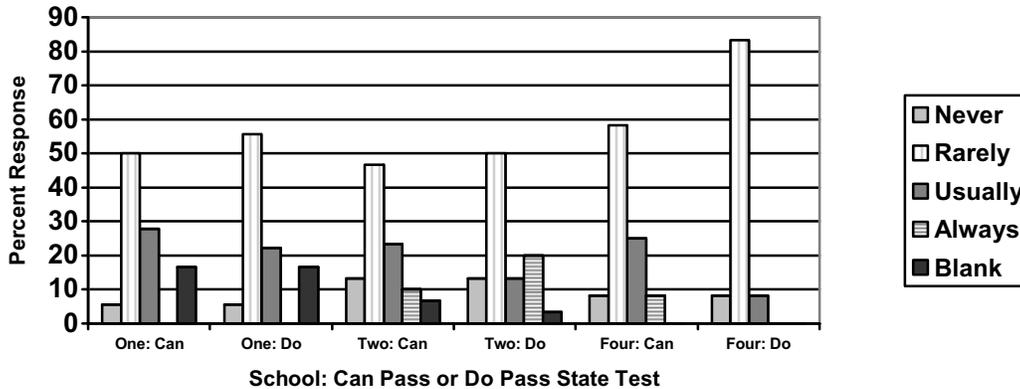


Figure 6. Performance-Related Data Elements (continued)

- 13) English language learners with disabilities can pass high stakes tests.
 AND
 14) English language learners with disabilities do pass high stakes tests.



Student- and Parent-Related Data Elements. Educators from different schools responded differently when asked about English language learners with disabilities’ and their parents’ understanding of the state test and test accommodations. In School 1, educators indicated these students always understand what the state test is, and always understand the concept of test accommodations. They were less convinced of the parents’ knowledge of the state test and test accommodations, indicating that parents only usually understand what the state test is and the concept of test accommodations. Educators at School 2 did not converge on one response regarding ELLs with disabilities’ and their parents’ understanding of the state test and accommodations, but reported very few “never” responses. Educators at School 4 reported that parents rarely grasp the concept of the state test or test accommodations (items 15 and 16), but the students usually understand what the state test is and what test accommodations are (items 17 and 18). The results from the student and parent-related survey items by school are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Student- and Parent-Related Data Elements

- 15) English language learners with disabilities’ parents understand what the state test is.

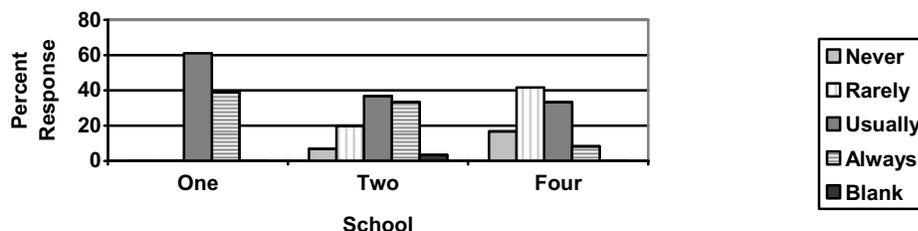
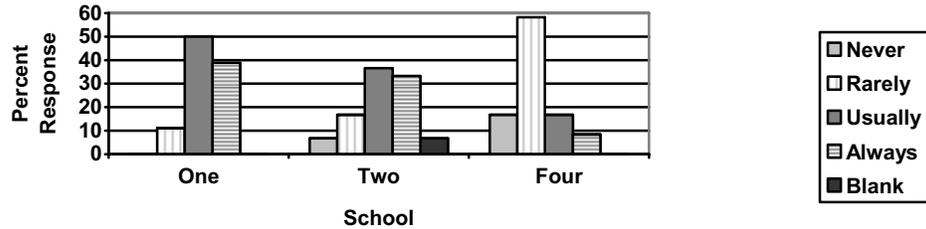
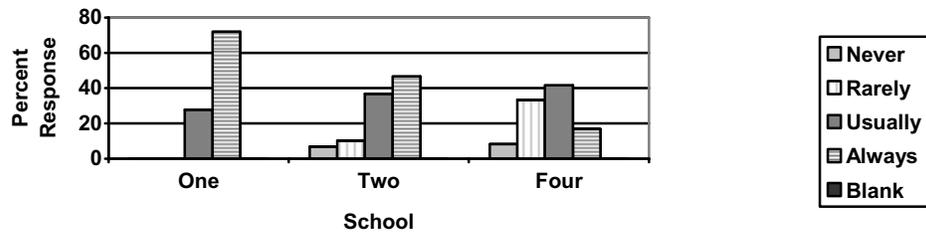


Figure 7. Student- and Parent-Related Data Elements (continued)

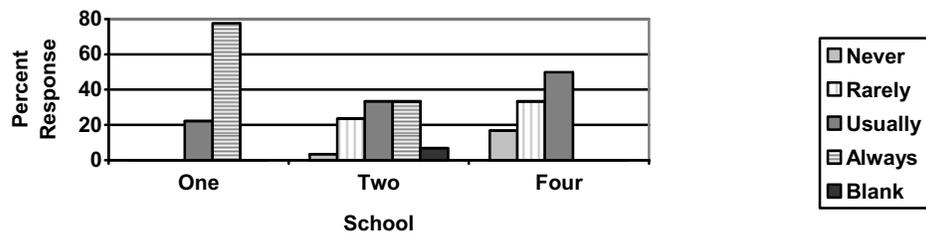
16) English language learners with disabilities' parents understand what test accommodations are.



17) English language learners with disabilities understand what the state test is.



18) English language learners with disabilities understand what test accommodations are.



Teacher-Related Data Elements. The participants from both elementary schools reported that there is always someone with second language expertise on English language learners with disabilities' IEP teams. Educators at the high school were less sure about the presence of an individual with second language expertise on these students' IEP teams, reporting that this individual is usually, but not always, present. Educators from all three schools indicated that special education teachers typically make the decision about what test accommodations these students will use to take the state test. Second language teachers, general education teachers, and other individuals also contribute to this decision. Participants were also asked to indicate which individuals in the school were most familiar with the family background of English lan-

guage learners with disabilities. At Schools 1 and 4, many educators did not know who knew the most about the family backgrounds. Other frequent responses by educators at Schools 1 and 4 were the same as these responses provided by educators at School 2: special education, second language, and general education teachers were most familiar. The nature of these data did not agree with a simple graphical representation of the data showing between school comparisons; therefore, these data are not represented by a figure.

Document Review

Results from the document review are presented by school to better reflect individual student information. Data for nine students from School 1, six students from School 2, five students from School 3, and seven students from School 4 are presented. Student information reported includes grade level, age, country of origin, years lived the in U.S., disability label, and retention status. Student assessment and services information reported includes large-scale assessment information (e.g., accommodations, alternate assessment, exempt status), language assessment date and the resulting English language level assigned by the school, second language instructional services provided, and special education services provided to the student.

School 1. Four of the nine students attended the school’s pre-Kindergarten program, and ranged from four to five years of age; there were also two grade 3 students (ages 10 and 12), one grade 1 student (age 6), one grade 2 student (age 8), and one grade 5 student (age 13). Most of these students were born in the United States, with the exception of student 3 (Puerto Rico), student 7 (Cuba), and student 9 (Peru). Of the foreign-born students, student 3 has resided in the U.S. for three years, most of his or her life, while student 7 resided in the U.S. for four years, only one-third of his or her life. It is unknown how long student 9 had been in the U.S. These students’ disability labels included specific learning disability (SLD; n = 6), speech impaired (SI; n = 5), developmentally delayed (DD; n = 3), language impaired (LI; n = 4), and other health impaired (OHI; n = 1). Five of the nine students had multiple disability labels. In terms of retention status, students 6, 7, and 9 were retained in Kindergarten, grade 3, and grade 2, respectively. Table 1 presents the information for the nine students at School 1.

Table 1. Student Information for School 1

Student	Grade Level	Age	Origin	Years in U.S.	Disability	Retained
1	Pre-K	4	U.S.	4	SLD, SI	No
2	Pre-K	-	-	-	DD, SI, LI	No
3	Pre-K	4	Puerto Rico	3	SLD	No
4	Pre-K	5	U.S.	5	DD, SLD, SI, LI	No
5	1	6	U.S.	6	DD, SI, LI	No
6	2	8	U.S.	8	OHI	K
7	3	12	Cuba	4	SLD	3
8	3	10	U.S.	10	SLD, SI, LI	No
9	5	13	Peru	-	SLD	2

Students below grade 3 did not have any large-scale assessment information in their files except for student 6, a grade 2 student, with test accommodations already included in his or her IEP presumably for next year's test administration; this was because grade 3 was the first grade of the state's large-scale assessment. One student took the alternate assessment in lieu of the regular state test. All three students who used accommodations on the state test took the test in a small group setting with extra time available. Student 6 also was allotted breaks during the test administration, and student 8 also had the test directions read aloud to him/her. All students' language abilities had been assessed in the past two school years, and resulting English language levels ranged from 2 to 4.

Eight of the nine students received some type of special education services; service information was not available for student 9. Six of those eight students received both in-class and pull out special education services and one of those students (student 8) also received speech and language therapy. Student 5 was placed in a self-contained special education setting, and student 6 received only pull out special education services. Five of the nine students received second language services in both special and general education. Student 5 received these services in his or her self-contained special education setting. Second language services were not known for three of the students in School 1. Table 2 displays student assessment and services information for these students.

Table 2. Student Assessment and Services Information for School 1

Student	Large-Scale Assessment	Language Assessment Date	English Language Level	Second Language Services	Special Education Services
1	-	8/2/2004	3	Yes, in special and general education	In-class and pull out
2	-	-	-	-	In-class and pull out
3	-	9/9/2004	4	Yes, in special and general education	In-class and pull out
4	-	1/10/2005	4	-	In-class and pull out
5	-	-	-	Yes, in special education	Self-contained
6	Small group, extra time, breaks	2004	4	Yes, in special and general education	Pull out
7	Alternate assessment	5/28/2004	2	Yes, in special and general education	In-class and pull out
8	Small group, extra time, read aloud	1/14/2004	4	Yes, in special and general education	In-class, pull out, and speech/language
9	Small group, extra time	2/2/2004	2	-	-

School 2. Student 6 transferred out of School 2 prior to the research activities; therefore, no information was available for this student. Of the remaining five students, three were seven years old, one was six years old, and one was eight years old. Four students were born in the U.S. and one student's country of origin and time in the U.S. were not known. All five of the students had a specific learning disability (SLD) special education label, three students also had a language impaired (LI) label, and student 2 also had a speech impaired (SI) label. Student information for School 2 is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Student Information for School 2

Student	Age	Origin	Years in U.S.	Disability
1	6	U.S.	6	SLD, LI
2	7	U.S.	7	SLD, LI, SI
3	7	U.S.	7	SLD, LI
4	7	U.S.	7	SLD
5	8	-	-	SLD
6	-	-	-	-

Two students in School 2 took the state alternate assessment; one student used two accommodations when taking the state test: a small group setting and extra test administration time. This information was not available for two students. All students' language abilities had been assessed within the past two school years, and all students had a resulting English language level of 4. The same two students who did not have large-scale assessment information available also did not have special education or second language service information available. Two students received both in-class and pull out special education services. One of these students (student 4) received second language services in only special education instruction, while student 5 received second language services in both special and general education instruction. Finally, student 1 was placed in a self-contained special education setting, and his or her second language services were unknown. This information is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Student Assessment and Services Information for School 2

Student	Large-Scale Assessment	Language Assessment Date	English Language Level	Second Language Services	Special Education Services
1	Alternate assessment	12/9/2003	4	-	Self-contained
2	-	2004	4	-	-
3	-	2004	4	-	-
4	Alternate assessment	9/16/2004	4	Yes, in special education	In-class and pull out
5	Small group, extra time	10/20/2004	4	Yes, in special and general education	In-class and pull out
6	-	-	-	-	-

School 3. Of the five middle-school students included in this study, two were 13, one was 11, and one was 15 years old. The age of student 5 was not known. Two students were born in the U.S., two students were born in Cuba, and the origin of student 1 was not known. The years spent in the U.S. were only known for student 3, who has been in the U.S. for eight years, a little more than half his or her life. Four of the five students had a disability label of specific learning disability (SLD) and two students had an educable mentally handicapped (EMH) special education label. Student 2, along with the SLD label, also had a speech impairment (SI) and a language impairment (LI). Student 5 also had multiple disability labels. Student 4 was retained in grade 2. This information is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Student Information for School 3

Student	Age	Origin	Years in U.S.	Disability	Retained
1	11	-	-	SLD	No
2	13	U.S.	13	SLD, SI, LI	No
3	13	Cuba	8	SLD	No
4	15	Cuba	-	EMH	2
5	-	U.S.	-	EMH, SLD	No

Three of the five students received language assessments in the previous school year. The other two students were assessed in 2002. All students scored an English language level of 4. Two of the students' files indicated receiving special education services: student 1 received pull out services and student 5 was placed in a self-contained special education setting. Two students received second language services in special education (students 4 and 5), one student received these services in general education (student 2), one student in only reading and language arts instruction (student 1), and this information was not available for student 3. Student assessment and service information is displayed in Table 6.

Table 6. Student Assessment and Services Information for School 3

Student	Language Assessment Date	English Language Level	Second Language Services	Special Education Services
1	10/4/2002	4	Yes, in reading and language arts	Pull out
2	3/9/2004	4	Yes, in general education	-
3	1/7/2002	4	-	-
4	5/12/2004	4	Yes, in special education	-
5	5/17/2004	4	Yes, in special education	Self-contained

School 4. The seven students at School 4 ranged in age from 15 to 18. Four of the students were born in another country: Mexico (n = 1), Puerto Rico (n = 1), and Haiti (n = 2). One student was born in the U.S. and the country of origin for the two remaining students was not known. Student 1 had moved to the U.S. five years ago, student 5 four years ago, and student 3 moved to the U.S. in the same year as his or her birth. Special education disability categories included educable mentally handicapped (EMH; n = 4), trainable mentally handicapped (TMH; n = 2), physically impaired (PI; n = 1), and specific learning disability (SLD; n = 1). Student 5 had multiple disability labels. Only student 4 was ever retained and this occurred in grade 6. Information for the students of School 4 is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Student Information for School 4

Student	Age	Origin	Years in U.S.	Disability	Retained
1	15	Mexico	5	EMH	No
2	16	Puerto Rico	-	TMH	No
3	16	Haiti	16	EMH	No
4	17	-	-	EMH	6
5	17	Haiti	4	PI, TMH	No
6	17	U.S.	17	EMH	No
7	18	-	-	SLD	No

Four of the seven students received some type of accommodation when taking the state test. All four students were allowed to take the test in a small group setting with extra administration time and had the test directions read aloud to them. Student 7 also had shortened test sessions and was allowed breaks. Student 5 met all exemption criteria and did not take the state test. This information was not available for students 2 and 4. Only one student (student 5) took a language assessment in the past two school years. The other students for which this information was known took this test in 2003 (n = 2), 2000 (n = 1), or 1997 (n = 1). English language levels ranged from 3 to 5.

Five of the seven students received special education services in a self-contained special education setting. One student (student 7) did not receive any special education services. This information was not known for student 3. Second language service was provided for one student; student 1 received these services in special education. This information is displayed in Table 8.

Table 8. Student Assessment and Services Information for School 4

Student	Large-Scale Assessment	Language Assessment Date	English Language Level	Second Language Services	Special Education Services
1	Small group, extra time, read aloud	-	4	Yes, in special education	Self-contained
2	-	4/16/2003	3	-	Self-contained
3	Small group, extra time, read aloud	5/12/2003	5	-	-
4	-	6/13/2000	5	-	Self-contained
5	Exempt	2/11/2004	4	-	Self-contained
6	Small group, extra time, read aloud	5/21/1997	5	-	Self-contained
7	Small group, extra time, read aloud, shortened sessions, breaks	-	-	-	No services

Student Interviews

Five of the seven student participants at School 4 were interviewed. Of the two who were not interviewed, one student was no longer enrolled at the school and one student was absent. Additionally, one student did not take the state test due to significant disabilities; the interview protocol was not followed with this student and the results of the interview are not reported here. Of the remaining four students, all had heard of the state test, mostly from teachers, friends and older siblings, announcements at school, and the media. When asked about the purpose of the state test, three of the four students had some understanding, providing responses such as, “for grades,” “to pass it,” and “to go to college.” None of the students had heard of test accommodations or modifications. When probed, one student commented that they “sound familiar” and that “somebody reads it [the state test] to me.” These students all took the state test in English. When asked about IEP meetings, all of the students were aware of their IEP, and two students indicated that they attended their IEP meeting. Of those two students, both responded that the IEP team did not talk about the state test at the IEP meeting, although one student mentioned that the IEP team did discuss accommodations, such as giving more time to take tests.

Parent Interviews

The results of the parent interviews are reported on a school-to-school basis. The results are further divided into four groups: (1) parent-educator communication, (2) state test, (3) special education, and (4) cultural background. Each group contains interview results pertaining to that topic. Parents’ responses are presented in English, Haitian-Creole, or Spanish, as appropriate.

Each Haitian-Creole or Spanish parent quote is followed by the direct translation from the bilingual interpreter who participated in the interviews. All parents are referred to as “she” for consistency simply because more mothers were interviewed and this provides a way to protect the identity of the respondents.

School 1: Parent-Educator Communication. The seven parents interviewed from School 1 communicate with the child’s two to three teachers, including the special education teacher, the regular education teacher, and the child’s paraprofessional. Parents talk with these educators primarily over the phone, mostly with the teacher calling the parent, and in informal meetings at school. Other forms of communication include teachers’ notes, a daily home-school binder, parent-teacher conferences, and open houses or parent nights. The frequency of communication ranges from daily, such as while picking up the child from school, to three times a year. Some parents responded that communication occurs whenever the parent wants or needs to speak with the child’s teacher. Conversations between parents and teachers usually focus on how the child is doing at school; more specifically, parents and educators discuss daily assignments and the child’s behavior, learning, development, and socialization.

***Parent:* Pero yo si tengo una duda o cualquier cosa, yo llama a la escuela o voy hablo con la maestro.**

Translation: But if she has any concerns or questions she will call or go to the school and speak with the teacher.

***Parent:* Si siempre vengo a ver como esta progressando.**

Translation: Yes, I always come [to the school] to see how she’s progressing.

These native Spanish-speaking parents reported that many of the educators at School 1 speak both English and Spanish, enabling conversations in Spanish when talking with these parents. When teachers do speak in English, parents indicated that a translator is always available, although one parent noted that she likes to practice her emerging English skills with her child’s teachers. The bilingual receptionist in the main office assists parents when they call or come to the school, and children sometimes translate informal conversations between their parents and their teachers. Combined, parents responded that they understood the teachers well, with teachers asking about parent understanding, teachers and parents repeating themselves when they were not understood, and parents asking questions when they did not fully comprehend. Parents indicated that speaking in Spanish either directly or through a translator aided their understanding. The only point of confusion for parents occurred when attempting to understand educational terms, such as language used in the IEP, or the term “accommodation.”

Parent: ...si la teacher si habla ingles ella busca alguien para que ...

Translation: ... yes, the teacher if she speaks English she'll find someone to [translate]...

Parent: Y siempre me ponen alguien que me traduzca.

Translation: And they'll always have someone to translate for me.

Interviewer: So when you talk to your daughter's teachers it's always in Spanish?

Translation: Asi que siempre que usted habla con los maestros de su hija es en espanol?

Parent: Porque es el idioma que yo entiendo bien.

Translation: Because it's the language that I understand well.

Parents also expressed a wide understanding of documents and papers they received from the school. These documents were written in both English and Spanish, and included letters, notes, daily notebooks, and even a Spanish copy of their child's IEP. Teachers often sent these documents home with the child instead of through the mail. Sending documents remedied the only obstacle to parent-teacher communication mentioned by the parents: the parent's work schedule conflicting with communication. When parents' schedules permit them to attend parent meetings or open houses, they find that these meetings are conducted in both languages. Although some parents may prefer talking with other parents who speak their same language, many parents will converse with other parents at these meetings, regardless of the language spoken. However, some native Spanish speakers who have lived in the U.S. for a while will only speak English in an attempt to hide the fact that they are native Spanish speakers.

Parent: No, I mean they send notes.

Interviewer: Ok, and they send them in English or Spanish?

Parent: Both.

Interviewer: And you understand all?

Parent: Ok.

Interviewer: When you go to school and all of the parents are there, do the Spanish speaking parents talk only to the Spanish speaking parents and English to English?

Translation: Cuando van a la escuela, sienten o notan que los papas hispanohablantes solo van interaccionando con papas hispanohablantes, que los que hablan ingles solo con los que hablan ingles, o se mezclan?

Parent: Se mezclan.

Translation: She said they mix.

While most parents were completely happy with their communication with educators at School 1, some parents did offer suggestions on how to improve communication with the school. For example, they recommended making appointments to meet with teachers to accommodate the parent's work schedule. Also, they suggested having more one-on-one meetings with teachers to remain up-to-date on the child's progress. One parent mentioned that she would prefer monthly teacher meetings and wished that teachers would inquire more about home practices. Finally, one parent suggested that the school assist students new to the country in developing friendships with same age peers because she noticed that her child was befriending younger children due to her child's emerging language skills.

State Test. All of the parents had heard of the state test through television, their children, meetings at the school, or parents' siblings. They offered similar understanding of the purpose of the test: to assess student development, knowledge, grade level, and abilities, and that students must pass this test. They expressed concern that their children are afraid of performing badly on the test. One parent also mentioned that the test has implications for the entire school, such that if the school performs badly, the school will be shut down and students will be transferred to another school. Parents are aware that school performance, measured by student test results, is reported through the A-F school grading system. To help improve school-wide performance on the state test, the school offers a summer camp to tutor students on state test subjects and conducts parent meetings regarding the state test to familiarize parents with the test. Parents reported that they do not talk with teachers about their child's state test participation if the child is not taking the state test (due to student age or disability); however, if the child will participate in the state test, teachers discuss the test with parents at the IEP meeting, explaining how the child will take the test according to his or her own abilities.

***Interviewer:* Do you know what the [state test] is for?**

Translation: Que si sabe para que es el [state test]?

***Parent:* Para evaluar su conocimiento, su nivel de conocimiento.**

Translation: To evaluate their knowledge, their level of understanding.

***Interviewer:* What do the kids say about the test?**

Translation: Que que dicen los ninos del examen?

***Parent:* Eh tienen miedo que van hacer el examen mal.**

Translation: They're afraid that they're going to do the test badly.

Special Education. When parents were asked about accommodations, they were unsure about what accommodations are. One parent understood accommodations after they were explained but did not know which accommodations her child received. Another parent knew that accommodations were for children with special needs and defined them as making children more

comfortable and helping them adjust, but commented that the word accommodation was difficult to translate in Spanish. Both of these parents knew that their children received some form of accommodation. A third parent mentioned that she did not talk to teachers about her child's accommodations at the IEP meeting. In regards to IEP meetings, the parents were uncertain as to what an IEP is without first having it explained to them. One parent mentioned that she had not heard of it by name, and another described it as a program to help the child. Finally, one parent offered more detailed information, explaining how she attended and was involved in the IEP meeting, and received a copy of the IEP in Spanish.

Interviewer: Do they talk to about an accommodation at this meeting?

Translation: Que si hablan de una acomodacion o un acomodo en esta junta?

Parent: No entiendo esa palabra.

Translation: I don't understand that word.

Interviewer: ...accommodation. It just doesn't translate well.

Translation: ...acomodacion. Como que no se traduce bien.

Parent: Eso quiere decir come que ella, como tratan de que ella se sienta mejor.

Translation: It means that like she, like they try to make her feel more comfortable.

Interviewer: Have you guys heard the term IEP?

Translator: Que si han oido ustedes el termino IEP?

Parent: No.

Interviewer: It's all of the papers...

Parent: Bueno por ese nombre no.

Translation: Well, by that name, no.

Cultural Background. A final question in the interviews focused on whether the parents had opportunities to share their culture at school. These parents expressed that teachers do not ask them about their culture, but do ask the children to share their culture, such as the customs, the food, or the flag from their country of origin, and the teachers design homework assignments and student storytelling sessions to do this. Some parents mentioned that the teachers were often from the same background as themselves, so that asking about culture was not necessary.

Interviewer: Do they ever ask you questions about your culture?

Translation: Que si le preguntan a usted sobre su cultura?

Parent: No... A mi no me preguntan directamente pero hacen muchas tareas y proyectos sobre la cultura de cada nino individual. O sea cada nino hace un proyecto de

su pais, su costumbres, todo lo que contiene.

Translation: No... They never ask me directly but they do a lot of homework and projects about each child's individual culture. I should say, each child does a project about his country, his customs, all that it contains.

School 2: Parent-Educator Communication. The six parents interviewed from School 2 communicate with teachers in a variety of ways, the most common being stopping by the school or via their home or cell phone. While some parents indicated that there was no need to make appointments or phone calls because they would speak with teachers before school, after school, during recess, or during class, other parents indicated that the school would call the parents or send home notes to set-up appointments. The amount of communication ranged from every day to a few times a week to not frequently. In addition to teachers, one parent discussed having meetings with the social worker at the school. Also, one parent disclosed that there was no communication with the school except when the child was misbehaving and the school called the parent to remove the child for the day. Other parent-teacher communication topics were more positive, including how the child is doing and progressing at school.

***Interviewer:* Ok, so that you just stop in at the school and find the teacher?**

Translation: Entonces que usted nomas viene al escuela encuentra la maestra y habla con ella?

***Parent:* Hablo y pregunto sobre le nino o el tambien me manda un papel, porque yo le dejo saber quiero saber como esta el nino, quiero ver como esta. El me hace una nota, me deja saber todo sobre le nino, lo que el va avanzando.**

Translation: She says that she will stop by and talk to him, or also she will ask and what he will do is he will send her a note home letting her know what's going on, how he's progressing, and how he's developing.

Rival Comment:

***Parent:* And let me tell you something about the other school that he's go before. At [School 2] the teachers don't send any papers, any papers on, ah, let him know about the things, about the kids, about how schools, just they calling to say he's bad in the school, he's no good in the school, you know, I don't have the time and they don't have the communication at [School 2], it's very bad...**

Other common parent-teacher communication facilitators were parent meetings or open houses, although one parent mentioned that she did not attend these meetings because they are too general

and do not focus specifically on her child. Those parents who did attend these meetings found that communication between parents was usually mixed, in that English- and Spanish-speaking parents conversed with each other. Two parents reported the opposite, that, due to the language barrier, English-speaking parents spoke to each other and Spanish-speaking parents spoke to each other, with very little mixing.

Interviewer: Do the English-speaking parents talk only to English-speaking parents and Spanish only to Spanish or do they mix?

Translation: Quiere saber si en estas reuniones grandes los papas hispanohablantes se quedan con los papas hispanohablantes y solo hablan con ellos, y los que hablan ingles solo hablan con los que hablan ingles o se mezclan?

Parent: Hay bastante mezcla, si.

Translation: She said there's plenty of mixing.

Parent: No se puede haber comunicacion porque no se conocemos el idioma.

Translation: She said they can't communicate because there's a difference in languages.

Communication between parents and teachers varied because some teachers were bilingual and some only spoke English. Similarly, some parents were bilingual while others only spoke Spanish. Fortunately, when an English-speaking teacher needed to converse with a Spanish-speaking parent, an interpreter was always available at the school, or the child would translate. Regardless of the face-to-face communication language or method, parents expressed that they typically understood the teachers well. Two parents added that teachers will ask them whether they understood and will repeat comments for improved understanding. There were still times when some comments made were confusing or not clear, such as when attempting to translate educational terms from English to Spanish. One parent commented that he could not understand these terms, even in Spanish, because they did not translate well.

Interviewer: Does the teacher ask you if you understand everything that she said through the translator?

Translation: Que si la maestra le pregunta a usted si entendio todo lo que le dijo por el interprete?

Parent: Si.

Translation: Yes.

Interviewer: And if you don't understand something, will you ask the teacher again?

Translation: Y que si usted no entiende algo, le vuelve a preguntar ala maestra?

Parent: Si.

Translation: Yes.

Translators were also available in the form of other family members or neighbors when a parent needed to read a note written in English sent by the school. Documents that the school sent home, such as state test information or notes requesting appointments, while typically written in both English and Spanish, were sometimes written only in English. A few parents reported that they frequently exchanged notes with their child's teacher, with the parent writing in Spanish and the teacher writing in either Spanish or English. One parent indicated that no documents were ever sent by the school.

***Parent:* They'll send a letter home.**

Interviewer: Ok, in English?

***Parent:* In English...well, sometimes they'll send it in Spanish, it depends, but mostly I try to see...if they don't have it on an English side they always have it on a Spanish side, but a lot of times they try to have it in both, so...**

Rival Comment:

***Interviewer:* Did they ever send home anything written to you?**

Translation: Que si les mandaban cosas escritas, papeles....

***Interviewer:* Letters, flyers...**

Translation: Cartas, bulletins...

***Parent:* No, I don't even know what happened in the school, I don't even know what the kids, the kids don't have to go to school, the kids have some, some different things in their week, I don't even know anything about it. Sometimes I prepare the kids to go to the school and that they don't have school.**

This same parent reported that she experienced very poor communication with the school, and did not have the time to communicate with the school. Other parents cited work schedules and younger children still at home impeding regular parent-teacher communication. Another concern raised was the inability to clearly communicate about the child's needs and issues due to the language barrier. While a few parents were completely satisfied with their communication with the school, other parents provided some suggestions on how to improve communication. These suggestions included daily parent-teacher notebooks, weekly bulletins from the school, more Spanish-speaking teachers, and English language classes for parents at the school.

***Interviewer:* Ok. Do you sometimes come to meetings at school with the teacher?**

Translation: Que viene usted algunas veces a juntas con el maestro?

Parent: No, realmente muy pocas veces. Porque, si hacen a una hora que ya yo tengo los tres niños en casa se me hace difícil, no tengo con quien dejarlos.

Translation: She said that not really, because it's difficult, because there's time when she has all three of her children at home so she doesn't have anyone to leave them with, no one to watch them.

State Test. Parents were asked whether they had heard of the state test. Although two parents responded that they have not, most parents knew about the state test. They cited various purposes for the test, such as to measure student knowledge and to determine the student's academic grade level, and indicated that it is a government-provided test. Also, these parents understood that if a student fails the test, they have to take it again. Parents reported learning about the state test from many different sources, including teachers, older children, the governor, television, newspapers, extended family members, documents sent from the school, and at the school. They also shared a variety of school-provided activities designed to help students pass the test, including sending books home with the student to study, pamphlets describing the test, before- and after-school programs, and tutoring. While one parent indicated that the state test was not discussed, another parent indicated that the state test, as well as measures to support her child while taking test, were discussed during the child's IEP meeting.

Interviewer: Do you know what these tests are for?

Translation: Que si saber para que son estos exámenes?

Parent: Para, yo supongo, bueno a mi entender que sean para saber si verdad si los niños saben. Si no hay un fraude se puede decir por ejemplo, para saber el límite académico de cada niño exactamente.

Translation: She said to know exactly where each child is academically, so that they can't fool you one way or another, so that you know how they are doing.

Interviewer: How did you hear about the [state test]?

Parent: Well, my son was in 3rd grade last year and he had it, and apparently he didn't do so well so he's going to take it again this year.

Special Education. As for IEP meetings, all but one of the parents knew of the IEP either on their own or after receiving a brief explanation. Most of the parents mentioned attending the IEP meeting, and one parent commented that her child is no longer in special education and no longer has an IEP. These parents were less sure about accommodations. One parent was not sure what an accommodation is, and one knew the literal meaning of the word but was unsure if her

child received any accommodations. Further, one parent mentioned that accommodations were not discussed at the IEP meeting. Only one parent knew of her child's instructional accommodations and knew that the school was providing as much support as possible for her child.

Interviewer: Have you heard of an IEP?

Translation: Que si sabe usted que es un IEP?

Interviewer: An Individualized Education Plan.

Translation: Es un plan de educacion individual.

Interviewer: The papers that have everything your daughter is learning and you sign it at school.

Translation: Que el plan, este plan tiene las metas de lo que va aprender su hija en la escuela, y que usted en una junta firma muchos papeles, si se acuerda de una junta donde vienen todos los maestros, los consejeros, el director?

Parent: Si, solo no recordí.

Translation: She just said she didn't remember.

Cultural Background. A final interview question asked parents about opportunities to share their culture at school. While one parent replied that teachers have asked her about her culture, most parents replied that the school did not offer an opportunity for them to share their culture. Perhaps, as one parent observed, many teachers were from the same background as many of the parents and did not need to ask questions about culture. As for offering students opportunities to share their culture, one parent said that teachers did not ask the students about their culture, while another parent said that teachers asked her child about the child's birthplace and the parent's birthplace.

Interviewer: I'm wondering if the teachers ever ask you any questions about your culture.

Translation: Ella quiere si los maestros o maestras del nino le pregunta sobre su cultura?

Parent: No.

Translation: No.

Interviewer: If the teacher's are speaking Spanish, do they have a similar background?

Translation: Que si los maestros que hablan espanol, tienen cultura similar a la de usted?

Parent: Bueno la maestra del nina es Cubana tambien.

Translation: Yup, she said that the child's teacher is Cuban also.

School 3: Parent-Educator Communication. It appears from the six parent responses that educators calling parents is the most common method of communication. The child's teacher

will call the parent's cell phone or leave a message on the home phone. One parent felt that the school did not call her enough. Parents call the teachers with a concern or worry about the child. Some parents mentioned going to the school to talk with the child's teachers, and other parents mentioned never going to the school. Some parents mentioned going to parent meetings or open houses, and other parents mentioned never going to those meetings. The majority of the parents who attended these meetings found they spoke to any other parent, regardless of the language spoken, and that somehow they understood each other, although one parent reported that there is more conversation among parents who speak the same language. This same parent indicated that an interpreter was not present at this meeting.

Parent: Si, si si. Por cualquier cosita me llaman al celular, a mi me llaman ...

Translation: Yes, yes, yes. For whatever reason they'll call my cellular, they'll call me.

Interviewer: The school?

Translation: La escuela?

Parent: Si de la escuela, se esta portando mal o bien, me llaman.

Translation: Yes, from school, she's being bad or good, they call me.

Interviewer: When you come to the school, do you talk to only Spanish speaking parents, only English speaking parents, or both?

Parent: Los dos.

Translation: She said both,

Parent: Yo hablo y alli me entienden.

Translation: She says that she just somehow gets them to understand each other.

The frequency of communication depended largely on the teachers; whenever the teachers would call or request a meeting is when parent-educator communication would take place. These conversations occurred often for one parent, and once or twice for others. Various topics were discussed during these conversations, including student behavior, student knowledge, reports of student progress, student meetings with the psychologist, to thank the parents for their hard work, or, as one parent put it, any little thing. Conversations were typically in English, sometimes in a combination of English and Spanish, and, for one parent, in Spanish. Some parents understand a little English, facilitating a more informal conversation combining the two languages. Despite most of the conversations being in the parent's non-native language, these parents indicated that they always understand because there is an interpreter available to them at school or on the phone at the parent's request. And, one parent reported that her child was the agent of communication between herself and her child's teacher, acting as both translator and courier.

Parent: Porque a veces a tenido el conducta que no era correcta, en ese caso me han llamado y yo he conversado con la profesora. Pero en este caso con la de [unknown] y yo converse con el y en esta vez ha visto en este caso cambio. Entonces ellos me llamaron me dieron gracias por la ayuda que habia prestado con el nino, que el nino ha avanzado mas, y ya tambien su diploma que le dieron. Estoy contento por eso.

Translation: So he says, yeah, he's been very attentive to the fact that, you know, his son has problems, especially, like, sometimes he'll behave in a manner that's not appropriate and if they've called him and let him know and because of that he's had a talk with his son so that the behavior's modified and that the teachers have called him back and said thank you very much for, for helping us with him, and that the girl that helps him also has said thank you for helping with the behavior issue.

Interviewer: But, if you were speaking with a teacher who spoke English you would prefer that there be an interpreter?

Translation: Pero si ustedes estarian hablando con un maestro o maestra de ingles preferian que hubiera un interprete?

Parent: Si, por supuesto sino no entendriamos nada.

Translation: Yes, of course, or else we wouldn't understand anything.

Interviewer: That in cases when you use an interpreter, do you feel that they understand everything you tell them?

Translation: Que si cuando tienen interprete sienten que ellos entienden todo lo que ustedes les dicen a ellos?

Parent: Si.

Translation: Yes.

Notes, documents, and report cards sent home with the students were written in both languages, easing understanding for the parents. However, some parents reported that they have not received any papers from the school in a while, and have not received a copy of the child's IEP. Parents cited other issues they have experienced in communicating with the school, namely the parent's work schedule impeding conversations, parents not knowing when parent meetings will be held, parents feeling badly when they do not understand school staff, and parents worrying that their children are not improving. To help remedy some of these obstacles, some parents provided suggestions on how to improve parent-teacher communication. These suggestions included increasing communication, holding half-hour individual parent-teacher meetings more frequently, videotaping any meetings at the school for the parent to review later, and not leaving messages for the parent in English. One parent could not think of any suggestions to improve communication.

Interviewer: Do you receive things from the school in writing?

Translation: Que si recibe cosas de la escuela escritas?

Parent: Hace tiempo que no recibo nada de eso.

Translation: It's been a while since I have gotten any of that.

Interviewer: What would you like for the school to do?

Translation: Que le gustaria a usted que haga la escuela.

Parent: Me gustaria que la escuela tuviera mas comunicacion con nosotros los padres respeto a su avance y sus estudios. En su avance de la capacidad del en tal que el tiene, producto a que ha sido atendido con psicologo y atraves de eso, para su desarrollo eso es lo que yo quisiera.

Translation: He says he would like more communication on his son's development. In terms of what everyone's doing, what the psychologist, and in terms of his development in terms of skills.

State Test. Parents at School 3 were asked whether they were aware of the state test. The common answer was that they did not know of it. One parent mentioned that she thought it was a test that is difficult to pass, but was not really sure what it is for. Only one parent provided a description of the test as being administered at the end of the year to see whether students should pass to the next grade. The parents who had heard about the state test heard about it from other parents, television reports about how schools and ethnic groups performed on the test, their children, other children, newsletters, and at the school in workshops that inform parents about how to best prepare their children for the test. They also discuss the state test at the student's IEP meeting.

Interviewer: Have you heard of the [state test]?

Parent: Yes.

Interviewer: Ok, how did you hear about them?

Parent: Que esta bien fuerte pero ella lo paso.

Translation: She says that it's really difficult that she pass the exam.

Interviewer: Do you know what these tests are for, the [state tests]?

Parent: Not really.

Interviewer: How did you hear about it?

Translation: Como se enteraron de el?

Parent: Bueno, yo oido del examen por las escuelas, en este caso siento que se han dado de los muchachos que los presentan en las noticias, en el noticiero, este que esta muy fuerte que en ingles en Spanish esos comentarios que estan en la television. Y lo que un

mas o menos comentan en el trabajo, como alguien por aqui...

Translation: Ok, he said he's heard about it in schools and also on television. That there have been reports about it, this school's doing well, this one's not doing well, talked about Latinos, how's they're doing, Americans, English, Spanish, and then also conversations around the way, that, you know, this happened to my son, or, that kind of stuff.

Special Education. Parents understanding of the IEP meeting was vague. A few parents remembered the meeting after having it explained to them, remembered signing the papers, that the IEP was written in both English and Spanish, and that an interpreter was present to facilitate understanding. One parent responded that she did not attend the meeting. Another topic discussed at the IEP meeting was the accommodations the student receives. Parent understanding of accommodations also seemed vague. While one parent was not sure whether her child received accommodations, one parent believed that her child was allowed extra time to take the test.

Interviewer: Have you heard of an IEP, Individualized Education Program?

Parent: No.

Cultural Background. When asked about opportunities to share their culture, most parents responded that they were not asked. One parent indicated that teachers sometimes asked her where she's from and she once brought in food from her native country for the teachers. Finally, one parent mentioned that culture determined her school choice for her child. This parent changed schools to have her child attend school with a larger population of students from the same background as the child.

Parent: Pero lo que pasa aqui donde yo vivo la escuela, ella pertenece a la escuela de los morenos, entonces yo pongo la direccion de el para que la nina no vaya a la escuela.

Translation: But what happens here where I live the school, she belongs to the school with blacks, so then I put his address on so she goes to the school [with Latinos].

School 4. Unlike the other three schools, the seven parents from School 4 come from two very distinct backgrounds: two parents are Latino, speaking Spanish as their native language, and five parents are Haitian, speaking Haitian-Creole as their native language. These two parent groups are combined for the results reported here.

Parent-Educator Communication. These parents typically talk with teachers, aides, and administrators at the school, either with an appointment or simply dropping-in, and either during school

hours or after school. To make an appointment, the school calls the parent at work or at home, sometimes leaving a message, or sends a letter to the parent requesting an appointment. While one parent indicated that she calls the school for reasons other than scheduling appointments, this, along with communicating that the child is sick, seemed to be the most common reasons for phone conversations. In-school communication topics included student behavior, grades, medications, how the student is doing in class, answering parent questions, sharing state test results, and sometimes just to talk. The frequency of communication spanned from everyday to three times a month, from three times a year to once a year. Some parents responded that they communicate whenever the school calls and others said they were unsure how often these conversations took place.

Interviewer: Do you have time to speak with [your child's] teachers?

***Parent:* Oh yes, sometimes I even come and talk to them, or when I pick him up after school I go and talk to them because they have to wait for the buses with the students, and, you know, they tell me how he's doing, sometimes I go to the classroom, and, you know.**

Interviewer: Ask her about how often would say she comes.

Translation: Konbyen fwa w panse ke w vini nan lekòl la?

***Parent:* M pa ka bay manti. Se lè yo bezwen m ouswa lè m bezwen yo tou m poze yo kesksyon pou m konnen kisa pitit [Unknown]**

Translation: I can't lie to you, just like whenever they tell me or whenever they call me, but I don't know exactly how many times.

Conversations between educators and parents are almost always in English, although some teachers speak Haitian-Creole and a few speak Spanish. There is usually someone available to interpret these conversations, even if it is an office staff person or the child. Every once in a while an interpreter is not available, and even with an interpreter, sometimes it is difficult to say what the parent wants to say. Some parents prefer to not use an interpreter, while others need the interpreter to understand the conversation. In fact, when these parents were asked about their understanding of parent-educator conversations, the most common answer was that they sometimes understood and sometimes did not. A few parents will ask questions until they are comfortable with their understanding. Other parents reported that they do not understand educational jargon or anything in English. Additionally, a few parents offered that they were not sure whether the school staff understood their conversations either.

***Interviewer:* Ok, now, with the interpreters, when you had someone interpret for you, were, do you feel that you, that they did a good job of translating everything the teacher said?**

Translation: Lè w mande moun pou tradwi pou ou, eske w santi w konfidan ke moun nan di tout sa ou vle di a?

Parent: M tande, mwen gen dwa paka “spell” Sa m di, mwen kwè sa m di a li di l.

Translation: Ok, I understand. I may, I may, I may not be able to say what I want to say, but I have, I understand when they...

Interviewer: Ok, so you understand everything they said to you.

Parent: Yes, yes

Interviewer: Ok, do you feel that they understood what you said to them?

Translation: Eske w kwè yo konprann sa w di yo a?

Parent: Yo konprann tou pafwa, mwen menm se paske m konnen yo pa ka konprann sa m di, m vle yo pale pou mwen.

Translation: They understand sometimes, that’s why I always want to make sure that someone, there’s somebody there to interpret for me because there are, if I talk to them they probably won’t understand what I want to say.

Communication between the school and parents also comes in paper form, with the school sending documents, such as permission slips, invitations to come to the school, and letters, home with the student or through the mail. While a few parents mentioned that they seldom or never receive any documents from the school, other parents noted that they receive student progress notes every day and meeting reminders whenever they have a meeting at the school. These documents come in many different language forms, depending on the preference of a parent, including Haitian-Creole and English, Haitian-Creole only, and English only. A few parents, both Haitian-Creole and Spanish speaking, requested to have the documents sent only in English.

Interviewer: Ok, ok, let me ask you this, does the school ever send papers home?

Translation: Eske lekòl la konn voye papye lakay la?

Parent: No

Interviewer: Yes? Ok, are they in Haitian-Creole or are they in English?

Translation: Eske papye yo konn voye ba w an Kreyòl ou an Anglè?

Parent: Gen de lè yo konn an Kreyòl, men lè yo plis voye Kreyòl m konn vinn la a pafwa di yo plis voye Anglè paske tout lòt timoun m fè yo gran. Se la yo gradye la tout bagay you plis konprann Anglè a. Yo plis esplike pi byen Kreyòl la m gen yon jan tade ladan pou m li.

Translation: They send them in Creole, but since my kids, they send them in Creole, sometimes they send them in English, but since my kids are all grown up now and they can read, they more comfortable reading the English, so I asked the school to send them in

English so that they can read it for me, because I kind of have difficulties reading the Creole myself.

Parents from School 4 cited a few obstacles to communicating with the school. For example, two parents had difficulties walking to school—their only mode of transportation—because of leg pain or safety when walking to nighttime meetings. Parents’ work schedule also impeded communication, as well as a lack of perceived follow-through from school staff. To combat these obstacles, parents offered some suggestions to improve communication. These suggestions included daytime appointments, phone calls in Haitian-Creole, practices to increase parent involvement in the school, regular feedback from the school on the student’s progress, and more Haitian-Creole speakers at the school. As an example of the range of parent satisfaction regarding parent-school communication, one parent had no suggestions for improving communication while another parent believed that the communication was poor.

***Parent:* Jiska prezan eskize m pafwa yo konn fè meeting lè yo fè meeting se toujou a sèt è, uit è. Se lè w pa gen machin, se yon kote ki trèt pafwa m di ok m pa konn ale akòz se lèswa. Lèswa pou m ap sòti kote m ap sòti a pou ap mache.**

Translation: Sometimes they have meetings and the meetings are at night when they have, uh, meetings for parents, they’re at night, and the area is kind of, yes, rough, and then since I don’t have a car I have to walk so I don’t come to meetings because I’m afraid for my safety.

***Interviewer:* Ok, good. Do you have any suggestions for how communication could improve at the school?**

Translation: Que si tiene usted algunas sugerencias en como se podria mejorar la comunicacion con la escuela?

***Parent:* Pues en meeting no porque la vez que venimos a meeting segun habian llamado todos los maestros y nomas venimos como unos quince padres. Entonces yo pienso que no hay mucha comunicacion con los maestros.**

Translation: She said that she doesn’t know because the last time she was called and she came to a meeting that only 15 parents came. And that the teacher, the school said that all the parents know, so she thinks there must not be good communication.

State Test. All seven of the parents interviewed had heard of the state test. They heard about it from their children, television, older children, other children, newspapers, or the school. Despite knowing about the state test, few parents knew of the purpose of the test. They described the test as being for students who are going to college and knew that students have problems passing it; these parents were concerned that their children would not pass the test because they were not progressing at school and were also concerned that if their child failed then they would not be

able to go to college. A few parents were not aware if their child took the test or not. One parent was aware that her child was exempt from taking the state test. As for the results of the state test, a few parents commented on their child's performance. For example, one parent indicated that her child passed the math portion but not the reading and another parent indicated that her child was to attend summer school to help with the test. Further, one parent told about how her child's teacher commended her child on her excellent performance while another parent was unsure of her child's performance. Finally, a few parents reported that the overall school grade was very low as a result of poor overall school performance on the state test.

Interviewer: Ok, do you know what these tests are for?

Translation: Eske w konn poukisa tès la la?

Parent: Bon tès sa a sa, m konnen de li si timoun nan pa pase tès sa a, li pa pral nan kolèj.

Translation: What I know about it, I, I, I heard if the child doesn't pass the test he won't be able to go to college.

Interviewer: Now, do you know if your son takes the test, the [state test]?

Parent: No, I don't know exactly, I don't know exactly.

Interviewer: Ok, have you heard like [School 4] has a certain grade?

Translation: Eske w tande [School 4] gen yon nòt yo ba li tankou lekòl ki bon, lekòl ki pa bon

Parent: Oh, li pa two bon

Translation: No, not too good, [School 4].

Special Education. Few parents could recall discussing the state test during their child's IEP meeting. The only parent who remembered discussing testing did so because her child takes the state alternate assessment. In fact, few parents even knew of the IEP meeting before having it explained to them. After explanation, one parent remembered going to the meeting at her child's previous school, and two other parents recalled going to the yearly IEP meeting, although one of those parents did not understand the meeting because it was conducted in English. Similarly, these parents did not know what an accommodation was without having it explained to them, and most did not know if their child received any accommodations. Only two parents could name accommodations that they believed their child received.

Interviewer: At the IEP meeting, do they ever talk about the [state test]?

Translation: Que si en esa junta, la junta del IEP, le hablan a usted del [state test]?

Parent: Yo creo que fue el año pasado pero no entendí nada porque era puro ingles.

Translation: She said that it was last year, but she didn't understand anything because it was all in English.

Interviewer: Ok, so then there probably is an accommodation for him then. He probably takes the test with someone else.

Parent: With someone else.

Cultural Background. When asked about opportunities to share their culture, two parents indicated that teachers do not ask them about their culture, while three parents indicated that teachers have asked them about their culture, such as what language is spoken at the home and where they are from. Teachers typically asked parents these questions at the open house. These open houses, or parent meetings, were attended by most of the parents interviewed. Most parents indicated that there is a mixing of parents at these meetings, meaning that people will talk to anyone, regardless of their native language. Some parents preferred talking only to other parents who speak their language, some parents preferred talking to English speakers so that they can practice their English language skills, and some parents preferred speaking in a mix of their native language and English.

Interviewer: ...because my next question was going to be do the teachers ever ask you questions about your culture so they can understand your child better, but because you're American...

Parent: No, sometimes they do, and, you know, I tell them, cause they go, why do you speak such perfect Spanish, because, you know how some of the Puerto Rican people they, they [Spanish linguistics term], well, since I do that, well, they think I'm Puerto Rican for that reason...

Interviewer: When you come to school and there are other parents, do you only talk to parents who speak Haitian-Creole or do you speak to parents who speak another language also?

Translation: Lè w vinn nan lekòl la gen anpil paran, eske w pale ak paran ki pale Kreyòl sèlman ousnon ou pale ak paran ki pale lòt lang tankou Panyòl ak Anglè.

Parent: Fò m pale Anglè a paske se Anglè a mwen bezwen.

Translation: Ok, I speak to those who speak English because that's the language that I need, I need to communicate with them.

Interviewer: Ok, so you talk so you can improve.

Parent: Yes, yes.

Teacher Interviews

Five teachers, one each from Schools 1 through 3 and two from School 4, were interviewed over the telephone and the results are reported here as a group to preserve anonymity. The results are divided into four groups: (1) parent-educator communication, (2) state test, (3) special education, and (4) cultural background.

Parent-Educator Communication. Teachers reported speaking with parents mostly before and after school, although one teacher mentioned talking with parents at any available time as many parents are often present at the school. Communication typically occurs when the teacher calls the parent, either at home or on the parent's cell phone. Sometimes a teacher will have the student call his or her parent on his or her cell phone for the teacher as the teacher does not always have the most up-to-date telephone number on file. The schools also hold meetings at times when it is easy for the parents to come to the school, as well as awards, parent involvement nights, and parent breakfasts. Additionally, some teachers will make home visits to talk with parents, and some teachers send home letters to communicate with parents. These letters are mostly sent home with the student or, less often, brought to the family on home visits, and are written in English and the parent's home language. One teacher mentioned that she always sends two copies of any letter to increase the chances that a parent will have the opportunity to read the letter.

Teacher: ...actually, one thing I just thought of is that so many of our kids have cell phones. The number in the computer for the home is frequently not correct. But, so many of our kids have cell phones...it often works to bring the student to the office and say, 'Here, call your home or call your mom.' This has been a tremendous way to actually get in touch with the kid's parents! Call your mom on your phone right now...it really works! In front of me, let me talk to your mom on your phone. It works!

Teacher: So really, the way, it's like fishing for parents, you know, but you, you, the bait is, you work on the children to get them excited [treats, awards] to bring in the parents and then disseminate parent information.

When asked which educators talk most often with parents, those interviewed provided a variety of responses, including regular education teachers, teachers who speak the parent's native language, self-contained classroom teachers, social workers, counselors, curriculum specialists, lead teachers, educators making home visits, second language teachers, teachers with a strong background in special education, or any teacher who shows initiative or cares about the student. Discussions typically revolve around student progress, behavior, or homework, but teachers and

parents also discuss testing, grades, fieldtrips, and individualized concerns about the student, such as the use of assistive technology in the home and the student's emotional state. Specific to the high school level, teachers discuss student employment and independence with parents.

Interviewer: Ok, do some teachers tend to talk to the parents more than others?

***Teacher:* In my case, yes, because I'm the resource teacher, the classroom teacher probably speaks to them more than I do.**

Interviewer: Ok, why, why would you say that is? Because the teacher spends more time, or what would you say?

***Teacher:* Yeah, because the teacher spends more time.**

Teacher: You know, trips, fieldtrips, I call home, grades, or they're not bringing in their homework, or they're not doing this, or you know, they're giving me a hard time for whatever reason, then I call home. You know, maybe there's something going on at home that I don't know about, and that's what's making the child react in school.

While teachers speak a variety of languages other than English (Haitian-Creole, French, Spanish), the teachers who speak the native language of the parent may communicate with parents without the use of a translator, or may be available to translate for English-speaking teachers. Teachers reported having many people available to translate when needed, even on the phone. The social worker, especially, is often available to translate. One teacher reported a concern about accurate translations, and preferred a translator with a strong special education background.

Teacher: And those who don't speak Spanish, it's harder for us to communicate with the parents, and you're just hoping that whoever you're having translate for you is actually translating exactly what you're saying, and not embellishing or leaving things out... well, usually, I try to bring in somebody, one of the teachers that I know has a stronger background in [special education] who can really translate exactly what needs to be said...

The five teachers interviewed shared many obstacles to parent-educator communication, but also provided many suggestions on how to improve their communication with parents. The most frequently cited obstacles included parents' lack of knowledge about special education, parents with their own disabilities, a lack of telephone service in the home, parent difficulties in coming to the school during the day (work schedules), and obstacles associated with cultural differences, such as the importance of the whole family taking part in parent-teacher meetings or families being embarrassed if their child does not succeed. Other issues included transient families or parents

being illegal aliens, parents doing all they can to take care of the family, inaccurate information or translations, and, specific to Haitian-Creole parents, since Creole is not a written language it is difficult for parents to understand documents. Suggestions to remedy these issues included nighttime or Saturday parent meetings, more community liaisons, meetings during breakfasts or dinners at the school, downplay the perceived authority of educators in the eyes of the parent, offer simultaneous and skilled translations, provide more media coverage of school activities, and use good communication techniques of establishing rapport and pay attention to body language.

Teacher: Frequently we find that the phone may be disconnected or the families have moved. It is a very transient population; however, when the parents do come in for the meeting... many of them take off an entire day of work...and they do not get paid for taking off an entire day of work to come and attend a meeting for their child.

Teacher: They are on a survival mode, a lot of the parents are [limited English proficient], they come from other countries, they're number one concern is making money to be able to feed their child.

***Teacher:* You need to find them [parents], grab them, talk to them.**

Interviewer: Ok

***Teacher:* Get them in person, I mean, if you know where they pick up their child.**

State Test. The teachers who were interviewed described numerous opportunities for parents to become aware of the state test. This list included from the student, during enrollment at the school, open houses, phone calls from the school, general and grade-level specific meetings at the school for all parents, PTA meetings, newsletters, community meetings and organizations, parent workshops, newspapers, and television and radio programs. All of these opportunities help aid parent understanding of the state test, but teachers still report mixed parental understanding of what the test is for. One teacher reported that parents understand the purpose of the state test after it is explained to them during one of the meetings, while another teacher reported that parents understand the retention consequence of failing the test, but do not understand why their child must be tested at grade level or how important the test is for their child. Other teachers indicated that the state test is an abstract concept and difficult for parents to grasp, and some parents are not familiar with the test because their child is exempt. They reported discussing the state test with parents at IEP meetings, among other activities previous listed, and reported discussing the state test with other educators during staffings and co-teaching collaboration.

Interviewer: Do you think the parents of [English language learners with disabilities] know about the statewide assessments, and, if so, how do they learn about it?

***Teacher:* The [state test], they don't know. Because that's where you want to do a night where you bring in the parents and you explain that stuff.**

Teacher: Some of them do know, for the majority they do know, um, they learn about them from their kids, or the school, we have open house or we sometimes call them out to tell them about the [state test].

These teachers also described numerous school-provided activities to help students succeed at the state test, the most common of which was tutoring before school, after school, and at night. Other activities included weekly state test preparation exams, specialized teacher training, motivational speakers, Saturday workshops with treats and prizes, summer camp geared towards the state test, pizza and popcorn parties, and a principal who vows to dress up as the school mascot if the school's results improve. Instructionally, teachers do all in their power to bring students up to grade level so that they are ready to take the test and spend a portion of the year teaching only state test content. Before testing begins at the high school, the school does a practice run of testing day so that students will be prepared. On testing days at the high school, the school provides breakfast for all the students. The students have a half hour of homeroom before reporting to their assigned testing location, which is posted throughout the school. Lunch is brought to them in that room as testing takes all day. Teachers at other schools reported student nervousness or anxiety on testing days.

Teacher: ...part of the school year until, 'til the [state test], that is all that we teach.

Teacher: The pep rallies, we do pizza parties, popcorns, a lot of rah-rah for [state test], principal dressed up as an eagle and walked around because our [state test] scores did go up, and she gave everybody a movie day, pizza day, party day, thing. So, we do a lot of that, we do a lot of, like I said, community, we have this, you know, there's the family literacy that we have here as well that we try to get parents involved. We do all the pre-school and after-school tutoring, we do, family nights, I mean, I don't know what more could be done.

Many of the teachers interviewed were not aware of the state test results from the current year because those had not yet been released. Still, two teachers indicated that they believed their school performed better this year than last. Many teachers knew of the current school grade-level, such as an "A" school or a "Triple F" school. In fact, one teacher mentioned that her school was one of the lowest performing schools in the nation resulting in smarter students leaving the school as they perceive that college is unattainable from an "F" school. Teachers also indicated that failing the

grade 3 test resulted in retention, failing the grade 10 resulted in the inability to graduate, and low scores resulted in intensive reading and math instruction. Inseparable from state test results are state test concerns. Some were already mentioned, such as retention, not getting a diploma, and the lack of a possibility of going to college. Teachers also expressed concern that the test is not administered at the student's ability level and that retention may cause a few much older students in class with students of typical age for the grade. A few teachers were frustrated due to their lack of control of these issues and mentioned that poor student attendance further complicates these issues.

Teacher: Students consequently leave the low performing schools. They leave the city and they go out to the suburbs or to magnet schools. Leave our school...all the smart kids are gone! All of the kids who might be college bound have left to go to higher performing schools around the county so we are left with...we have no gifted students. We have one honors English class. I think we have one honors math class. We have no AP courses. So the smart kids who want to go to college leave. They cannot go to college coming from an F school.

Teacher: Now, if you're going to retain them in 3rd grade a couple of years, by the time they leave, by the time they get here if they're having difficulties, I could have a 21 year old here with 11 years olds, and that's just scary for me.

Special Education. In the IEP meetings, teachers talk about the student's disability, the state test, and accommodations available to the student. Specifically, a local educational administrator's role in the meeting is to discuss the state test. Teachers reported that parents do not always attend these meetings, and even when they do, are not aware that they can make decisions regarding their child's IEP and education. Specific to test accommodations, most teachers believed that parents somewhat understand what accommodations are, but sometimes need to have them explained in detail and only some parents know what accommodations are for. One teacher commented that these parents do not know these things. Teachers also discuss the accommodations afforded to ELLs with disabilities with other teachers. These accommodations include a small group setting, additional test taking time, breaks, read-aloud directions, and read-aloud problems on the math portion of the test. One teacher reported nonsensical discrepancies between accommodations available to English language learners and English language learners with disabilities in that some accommodations are available for English language learners but not English language learners with disabilities.

Interviewer: ...In terms of test accommodations for these kids, do you think parents understand, do they know what test accommodations are for, that the kids are receiving them?

Teacher: They understand because in the IEP meeting you explain to the parent why this is necessary, and then if the parent is in nonagreement, then you, you go through mediation, you know, if that were the case, but parents usually know, they understand that the child needs extra time, the child needs a smaller, directions read aloud, you know.

Cultural Background. All of the teachers responded that they believed they had adequate information regarding their students' cultural backgrounds. They gain this information by reading the students' cumulative files, psychoevaluation files, or IEPs, by asking other educators, or by asking the students themselves, especially within the first few weeks of school. When asked which educators are most familiar with this information, the teachers interviewed replied: special education teachers, coaches, social workers, teachers from the same background as the student, or any student-connected teacher who takes the initiative to gather this information. Students are afforded opportunities to share this information through luncheons, assemblies, poems, costumes, and demonstrations during cultural weeks and cultural heritage days. Two teachers indicated that students do not share their culture, one because everyone has the same background at one of the schools, and the other teacher instructs only nonverbal students who cannot share this information.

Teacher: I ask a lot of questions to other, I, I have two paraprofessionals that work with me, they are not Haitian, they are African-American. They've been in the system so long, that they're able to kinda hint me onto what works for them, how their culture is...you see, I have their IEPs, all of the admin...it's called a psychevaluation paper form that you can kinda read, like where they were born...

Finally, teachers offered some interesting cultural differences they encountered in working with parents of ELLs with disabilities. For example, parents from certain cultures expect the school to fully discipline students and view student failure as the school's fault. Other parents expect decisions to be made automatically at the school without their consent and are familiar with high-stakes testing situations as they encountered them in their native country. Some parents refuse to admit to anyone that their child has a disability, except in the IEP meeting. Some parents refuse to look an educator in the eye when speaking with them, as they view educators as authority figures. Teachers indicated that some students lack basic American background knowledge that makes some educational situations, including testing, difficult. Further, some teachers added that some parents are overwhelmed with living in a new country and that there is a direct correlation between parent education level and the level of immersion into American culture.

District Interview

Two district level employees participated in a group interview. Their responses are divided into four categories: (1) obstacles that challenge home-school communication, (2) solutions the district uses to overcome those obstacles, (3) ways in which parents learn about the state test, and (4) interdistrict activities regarding English language learners with disabilities. Direct quotes from these district level staff are woven into the results, and indicated with quotation marks.

Obstacles that challenge home-school communication. While the two respondents believed the language barrier to “be the critical one [obstacle],” they reported many other perceived obstacles. Parents not showing up for scheduled meetings, parents unaware of their rights and roles in the special education process, parents stigmatizing “a handicapping condition” that would qualify the student for special education, a lack of parental concept of the special education process, and, more generally, the process of communicating with an individual from a different culture all present blocks to home-school communication. Additionally, “schools are limited in resources and personnel” to communicate with some parents due to the numerous different languages spoken by families in the district, as the district is located in “the city with the largest population of foreign born residents in the world.” Other issues arise when considering special education because it “has so many different terminologies and so many legalities that they [the parents] don’t understand.” The overarching obstacle “is educating the parent and providing a clear message that they understand in their language.”

Solutions the district uses to overcome those obstacles. Sending documents to parents written in English and the parent’s native language, formal and informal educational programming for parents in their native languages, and networking with community parent organizations for parent outreach and support services are only a few of the solutions the district employs to improve home-school communication. They also provide parent liaisons to “orient parents on their rights, procedural safeguards, what’s out there for their children,” and attend IEP meetings “to remediate any issues that come up in their language and serve as a facilitator.” They provide media supports, such as audiophones, so that parents may listen to meetings in their native language and then participate in the meeting. Schools within the district do their own parent outreach activities, and various community organizations hold conferences and forums that assist parents in accessing school resources. Also, each of the six regions within the district has a parent resource center “with literature, materials, [and] information...for parents so they can learn to advocate for their children and also get a better education and perhaps even be employed within the school district.” These regional parent resource centers also create staff development opportunities for district staff to improve home-school communication.

To serve those students who do not speak one of the top three languages spoken in the district (English, Haitian-Creole, or Spanish), the district has a multi-lingual team that “provides

instruction in an additional 23 languages, direct instruction,” and this team will also provide interpreters for parents, such as for an IEP meeting. When the multi-lingual team cannot provide an individual to interpret, the district uses its contracted service with an interpreters network to hire an interpreter for the meeting. Whenever an interpreter is used in an IEP meeting, the interpreter signs the IEP to indicate his or her presence.

Ways in which parents learn about the state test. The district distributes needs assessment surveys to parents to gather data on what parents want and need to know more about. The state test is a popular response and the district provides, to any school that requests it, formal educational programming for parents regarding the state test. Parent workshops and forums given by the school district and community organizations often present information regarding the state test: what it is, why students take it, and alternate assessment options. Additionally, the district sends parents written information about the state test that is always in the parent’s native language.

Interdistrict activities regarding English language learners with disabilities. The different education divisions within the district (general education, special education, and second language education) all work very closely together; “there’s a strong link, I think, and a very strong communication that exists between the district in many forms.” Second language educators provide services and support for the student and collaborate with the student’s general and special education teachers. Any teacher with an English language learner with a disability in his or her classroom must have an endorsement in exceptional student education that helps the teacher “provide and deliver the instruction as required by the IEP.” The district works “very closely in notifying those teachers, in making sure that they know what their requirements are, and providing the professional development that’s required.” For example, the district provides 60 master point plan training to be endorsed in second language education that is equivalent to five 3-credit university courses. They also provide specialized workshops for special education and second language educators with a focus on literacy and inclusionary practices, and one-day second language compliance workshops for all educators. District level employees conduct program reviews where they “literally go into the program and [they] go into every single classroom where there’s an [English language learning] student and see what’s being offered, what strategies are being used, and if they’re not, [they] comment...obviously [they] meet with the administrator,” and they “look at the IEPs to make sure they’re in compliance with what the requirements are, what they should be provided with, if the teacher is endorsed or not, and a report is literally given to the school, it’s sent from this office, to the school.”

Discussion

The purpose of this case study was to clarify some of the issues surrounding the inclusion of English language learners with disabilities in large-scale assessment programs. To meet this goal, we gathered school level information from one district in a Southern state via written surveys, document reviews, and interviews. A number of striking trends emerged highlighting important aspects of these students' inclusion in large-scale assessments. Each trend, along with supporting evidence, is presented.

Trend 1: How English language learners with disabilities participate in the state test depends largely on their grade level and school attended.

When considered collectively, teachers responded to the written survey that most of these students took the regular state test with accommodations, and that the alternate assessment was rarely or never administered to these students. However, a closer look at survey results between Schools 1, 2, and 4 indicated that teachers believed elementary school students were more likely to take the regular state test and use accommodations on that test than were high school students, and the accommodations used by these students varied based on the school attended. In addition, students in School 1 appeared to be the least likely to receive an alternate assessment, followed by students in School 2, and students in the high school (School 4). Contrary to the written survey results from educators in School 4, the document review revealed that none of the students in School 4 who were included in that review were given an alternate assessment. Thus, it appears, in some cases, there are discrepancies between how educators believe ELLs with disabilities are included in the state test and how these students are actually included. There also appears to be a lack of consistency in state test inclusion across grades and schools in the district.

Trend 2: The state test performance of English language learners with disabilities is concerning to parents and educators.

In terms of performance, elementary school teachers were not as convinced as high school teachers that ELLs with disabilities were able to demonstrate what they know and can do on the state test, but even the high school educators were not completely convinced that these students could do this. One point of agreement among all the educators across schools was that these students rarely can be or are proficient on the state test, and rarely can pass or do pass the state test, painting a grim picture of teachers' perceptions of how these students perform on the state test. Both parents and teachers expressed concern about these students' poor performance on the state test, especially in regards to the high-stakes outcomes of retention in grade 3 and graduating in high school.

Trend 3: The many district- and school-provided activities designed to increase family awareness and student performance on the state test are attaining their goals.

Educators and district staff reported many opportunities and activities to orient families to the state test, and better prepare students to take the test. For example, they provide parent meetings or open houses, send newsletters, endorse community meetings and organizations, guide media coverage, and offer workshops for parents. For students, they offered tutoring services, parties and assemblies praising performance and promoting awareness, state test focused instruction, and state test practice runs. Parents, mostly at the elementary and middle school level, remembered many of these activities, such as parent meetings and workshops, newsletters, media coverage, and summer camp tutoring. This is evidence that these efforts are raising awareness about the state test among families. And, although the most recent state test results were not yet made public, educators were optimistic that students, and schools in general, had improved their performance.

Trend 4: *English language learners with disabilities have a surface-level understanding of their state test participation and special education supports.*

As a whole, teachers from all of the schools indicated on the written survey that these students generally knew of the state test and test accommodations. The high school students interviewed partially supported their teachers' beliefs. They reported that they knew of the state test but had a vague understanding of the purpose of the test. Also, although these students knew of their IEP, none of these students knew of test accommodations afforded to them by their IEP before having them explained.

Trend 5: *Most parents of English language learners with disabilities, especially at the higher grade levels, have little initial understanding of their child's state test participation and special education supports.*

As a whole, teachers indicated on the written survey that these parents generally knew of the state test and test accommodations. However, this collective report may be misleading as, separately, elementary school teachers echoed this result but high school teachers reported that the parents rarely knew of the state test or test accommodations. Those teachers interviewed also reported mixed or partial parental understanding of the state test and accommodations, and, along with the district staff interviewed, were concerned about parents' seeming lack of awareness of their decision-making role in their child's education.

The parent responses somewhat supported the teacher's beliefs. At the elementary school level, most, if not all, of the parents knew of the state test and had good understanding of the purpose of the test. At the high school level, parents were less sure of the purpose of the test. At the middle school level, most of the parents had not heard of the state test and did not fully understand the purpose of the test. As for their child's IEP and accommodations, most parents across schools expressed not knowing of the IEP before it was explained to them and seemed to have an almost complete lack of understanding of accommodations, with only a few parents having an idea of the accommodations their child received.

This lack of initial parental understanding could easily be attributed to parental confusion when attempting to understand educational terms, such as the language used in the IEP or the term “accommodation.” Even with an interpreter, parents expressed frustration because much of the English educational jargon does not translate well to other languages. District staff also mentioned this disconnect as a concern, and, based on parents’ interview responses, this is a valid concern.

Trend 6: *English language learners with disabilities and their parents often have different recollections of IEP meetings than educators, and some procedures within these meetings vary across grade level.*

The elementary schools appeared to always have a second language expert on the IEP team for ELLs with disabilities, but the same was not true for the high school. In all schools, teachers reported that they collectively made decisions regarding the education and testing of these students, although the special education teachers seemed the most likely to have a say in these decisions. When interviewed, educators responded that they all discussed the student’s disability, accommodations, and the state test during the IEP meeting. Yet, the few high school students interviewed who had attended their IEP meetings did not remember anyone talking about their state test participation. Parents at the high school agreed with their children, reporting that they did not recall talking about the state test during the IEP meeting. Parents at the elementary schools and the middle school reported that, for the most part, they did recall discussing their child’s state test participation at the IEP meeting but did not recall a discussion about accommodations.

Trend 7: *There are similar student characteristics among English language learners with disabilities.*

There were obvious trends among the student characteristics. For instance, specific learning disability was the most common special education label for elementary and middle school students, and educable mentally handicapped for high school students. Perhaps as a function of the disability labels, there were more students served in self-contained educational settings in the high school. It also appeared that there were more foreign born students in the higher grades, and less second language services provided or needed for older students. Additionally, the English language level, measured by the language assessment, was tied less to age and more to the years spent in the United States. For example, on average, a 6-year-old student who lived in the U.S. his or her entire life would test at a higher English language level than a 13-year-old student who moved to the U.S. three years ago. One parent echoed this by saying that her child was befriending younger children who matched her child’s language level.

Trend 8: *When considering communication between educators and parents of English language learners with disabilities, there are some striking differences between schools, but there are also important district-wide similarities.*

Across all schools, the preferred mode of communication was having the educators call the parents, and many educators mentioned the convenience of the parent's cell phone when they were unable to reach anyone at the child's home. Informal meetings at school and school-to-home notes were also frequent communication forms for parents and educators. Other common communication modes mentioned by parents were making appointments to meet with educators at the school and educators making home visits. Differences in communication modes included middle and high school parents who reported attending fewer parent nights than the elementary school parents. Additionally, the frequency of parent-educator communication varied for each individual family, but in the elementary schools it appeared that the frequency of communication was determined by how often the parents contacted the school while in the middle and high schools it was the other way around.

The most common conversation topics across the schools focused on how the child is doing, the child's progress and what he or she is learning, and the child's behavior at school. There were also many school-level specific conversation topics. At the elementary level, parents discussed daily assignments and the child's social development with the teachers. At the middle school (School 3) parents and teachers focused more on issues specific to the child, such as the child's visits to the psychologist. At the high school (School 4) parents and teachers focused more on the child's health (e.g., medications, assistive technology, reporting illness related absences), educational evaluations (e.g., grades, testing), and future (e.g., jobs, independence).

One striking and important similarity was the comfort in parent-educator communication in these schools. Parents and educators, especially at the elementary schools, indicated that parents feel welcome at the school at any time and often stop in for informal conversations at their leisure. At both Schools 3 and 4, parents also mentioned discussing "any little thing" with teachers, again highlighting the comfortable relationship between parent and educator. It appears that, for the most part, communication between parents and educators in the district is open, valued, and widely practiced.

Trend 9: *Translators, who have a large impact on facilitating parent understanding, were less readily available at the high school than the other schools.*

Parents from School 1 and School 2, the elementary schools, had similar experiences in terms of the language used for, and their understanding of, parent-educator conversations. These parents and educators from all schools reported that a translator, such as the school social worker, is always available to them if needed, and the child will sometimes translate more informal conversations. They expressed having a good understanding of their conversations with educators, and that the educators would check to make sure that they understood. The only slight difference between these schools was that parents in School 1 reported that most of the teachers there are bilingual (Spanish/English) while parents at School 2 reported that only some of the teachers are bilingual. Parents from School 3 reported similar experiences in that a translator

is always available to them if needed and that the child will sometimes translate more informal conversations, but reported that most of the educators speak only English.

The largest difference was in School 4. These parents also mentioned that their children will help translate for them, and, similar to School 3, expressed how most teachers speak English, but the rest of the experience was different. They reported that a translator was usually but not always available if needed, that it was sometimes difficult to say what they wanted to say, and that teachers did not check for their understanding. Consequently, parents in School 4 reported varied understanding of their conversations with educators.

Trend 10: *Educators learn about the cultural background of English language learners with disabilities directly from the students and through indirect means.*

Most parents reported not receiving many, if any, opportunities to share their culture with educators, with the exception of a few high school parents. In the elementary schools, parents indicated that most of the teachers come from the same cultural background as the parents, thus not needing to ask parents about their culture. These parents also indicated that their children do receive opportunities to share their culture at school, through assignments and activities.

Yet, educators are learning about their students' cultural and family background somehow. They responded in the written survey that general, special, and second language educators typically know this information. When interviewed, educators claimed that they had adequate information about their students' cultural backgrounds and mentioned that they gained this information by reading the students' files, asking the students directly, talking with other school staff, or through cultural activities at the school. They also learn about these cultures when interacting with the families of ELLs with disabilities, evident by the cultural differences educators and district staff reported experiencing when working with these individuals.

Trend 11: *Although many obstacles to parent-educator communication were reported, participants were optimistic in providing many suggestions on how to overcome those obstacles and improve outcomes for English language learners with disabilities.*

By far, the main obstacle indicated by parents at all schools as impeding quality parent-educator communication was the parent's work schedule. Other obstacles mentioned included parents prioritizing the care of their family, not fully understanding the educators or not being able to fully express themselves, not knowing when parent meetings are scheduled, and issues with getting to the school on foot. Educators also cited the parent's work schedules, prioritizing family care, and poor translations as obstacles to communication, but reported other obstacles concerning additional parent (e.g., lack of special education knowledge, disability) and cultural (e.g., extended family involvement, spoken not written language) characteristics. District staff agreed with many of the parent and cultural obstacles, and also mentioned school-level obstacles to communication, such as lack of resources and personnel.

Suggestions from parents to improve parent-educator communication focused on increasing opportunities to communicate (e.g., make appointments to accommodate parent’s work schedule, more one-on-one meetings with educators, daily and weekly written communication from educators) and working to eliminate the language barrier (e.g., employ more non-English speaking educators, provide English language classes for parents at the school, do not leave phone messages in English). Educators suggested more media coverage of school activities and paying attention to culturally competent communication techniques. Additionally, the district staff added to these responses by providing details about available school and community outreach and parent education programs provided in the parent’s native language. Taken together, these suggestions can not only help increase parent-educator communication, but also break down the language barrier while teaching parents about their students’ educational experience.

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Appendix

Instruments:

Written Survey

Student Interview Protocol

Parent Interview Protocol

Teacher Interview Protocol

SURVEY Directions: Answer the questions below for English language learners with disabilities when they take the state test. **There are no right or wrong answers!**

1 = Never

2 = Rarely

3 = Usually

4 = Always

To answer the questions on this page, use:

Please **CIRCLE** the best answers **FOR YOUR SCHOOL**.

1) In my school, English language learners with disabilities take the state test.	1	2	3	4
2) In my school, English language learners with disabilities use accommodations to take the state test.	1	2	3	4
3) English language learners with disabilities use ONLY special education accommodations to take the state test.	1	2	3	4
4) English language learners with disabilities use ONLY second language accommodations to take the state test.	1	2	3	4
5) English language learners with disabilities use BOTH special education and second language accommodations as needed to take the state test.	1	2	3	4
6) In my school English language learners with disabilities can demonstrate what they know and can do on the state test.	1	2	3	4
7) In my school, English language learners with disabilities complete all test items when they take the state test.	1	2	3	4
8) English language learners with disabilities complete about half of the test items when they take the state test.	1	2	3	4
9) English language learners with disabilities complete ten or less test items when they take the state test	1	2	3	4
10) In my school, English language learners with disabilities can be proficient on the state test.	1	2	3	4
11) English language learners with disabilities are proficient on the state test.	1	2	3	4
12) English language learners with disabilities can pass high stakes tests.	1	2	3	4
13) English language learners with disabilities do pass high states tests.	1	2	3	4

13) In my school, English language learners with disabilities' parents understand what the state test is.	1	2	3	4
14) English language learners with disabilities' parents understand what test accommodations are.	1	2	3	4
16) In my school, English language learners with disabilities understand what the state test is.	1	2	3	4
17) English language learners with disabilities understand what test accommodations are.	1	2	3	4
18) Most of the English language learners with disabilities in my school participate in an alternate assessment to the state test.	1	2	3	4
19) There is someone with second language expertise on English language learners with disabilities' IEP teams in my school.	1	2	3	4

PLEASE ANSWER AS BEST YOU CAN.

1) In your school, who decides what test accommodations English language learners with disabilities use to take the state test. (ALL that apply.)

- Special education teacher(s)
- Second language teacher(s)
- General education teacher(s)
- Parent(s)
- SPELL
- Other (If so, who? _____)
- Don't know

2) In your school, who knows English language learners with disabilities' family background information? (ALL that apply.)

- Special education teacher(s)
- Second language teacher(s)
- General education teacher(s)
- Parent(s)
- SPELL
- Other (If so, who? _____)
- Don't know

3) I teach or have taught:

(ALL that apply. Provide number of years taught also!)

_____ **Special education** (Number of years _____)
 _____ **English as a Second Language** (Number of years _____)
 _____ **General education** (Number of years _____)
 _____ **Other (If so, what? _____)** (Number of years _____)

4) I instruct or have instructed English language learners with disabilities.
 (**ALL** that apply. Provide **number of years** taught also!)

_____ **Special education** (Number of years _____)
 _____ **English as a Second Language** (Number of years _____)
 _____ **General education** (Number of years _____)
 _____ **Other (If so, what? _____)** (Number of years _____)

5) I have taught for a total of _____ years.
 (**ALL** that apply. Provide **number of years** taught also!)

_____ **RSP** (Number of years _____)
 _____ **SDC ... M/M** (Number of years _____)
 _____ **SDC ... M/S** (Number of years _____)

THANK YOU!

Student Interview Protocol

Opening: My name is (name) from the University of Minnesota. I am one of the researchers who is working in (school name) this week. I am doing a research study on how your teachers can work better with your parents. When we are finished, I have a gift card for you as thank you for helping us with our research study. Do you have any questions about what we are going to do?

I will be writing down your answers to my questions. Is that all right with you? I will not be using your name in anything that I do for the project. Thank you. Let's begin.

Q1) Have you ever heard of the state test? How did you hear about this test?

PROBE: From your teacher? From your friends? From someone in your family? In the newspapers?

Do you know what these tests are for?

Do you know why these tests are important? If so, why are they?

Q2) Have you ever heard of test accommodations? Or possibly modifications?

How would you explain test accommodations to a friend or family member?

PROBE: Such as more time to take the test. Or, taking the test in a small group of students?
Or, using a dictionary during the test?

What do you do when you take the state test?

Do you have anything there to help you understand the test better? Large print? A dictionary?

Do you take the test in your language? Or, in English?

Do these accommodations help you better understand the test?

How do these accommodations help you?

Q3) Do you know what an IEP team meeting is? If so, do you go to them? What happens there?

PROBE: Do you go to any meetings with your teachers and parents to talk about what you learn at school?

Do the people at the meeting ever talk about the state test? If so, do they talk to you about the test? Do you say anything about the test?

Do the people at the meeting ever talk about test accommodations? If so, do they talk to you about accommodations? If accommodations are used, do you help decide which accommodations to use to take tests?

Thank the participant and share the gift card!

Parent Interview Protocol

Opening: My name is (name) from the University of Minnesota. I am one of the researchers who is working in (school name) this week to conduct a research study on how teachers can work better with families who speak a language other than English at home. When we are finished, I have a gift card for you as a thank you for helping us with our research study. Do you have any questions about what we are going to do?

It's often difficult for me to remember and write down your answer quickly. Do you mind if I use a tape recorder for our interview. Your name will not be on the tape and I will never use your name in anything that I do for the study. Thank you. Let's begin.

Q1) Do you have time to talk to (student's name) teachers? If so, how often do you talk to them?

How do your child's teachers communicate with you? How often?

What is the easiest way for teachers to communicate with you?

PROBE: At school? In meetings? After or before school? On the telephone?

Do you usually call the teacher? Or, does the teacher call you first?

What suggestions do you have for improving communication between parents and teachers?

Q2) Which teachers do you talk to the most?

PROBE: Do you tend to talk to many teachers or just one or two of them?

What do the teachers talk to you about?

Q3) Have you ever heard of the state test? How did you hear about this?

PROBE: In the newspapers? From your child? From teachers at school? From friends or family members? From you child's IEP team meeting?

Do you know what these tests are for? How would you explain that to another adult in your family?

Q4) Have you ever heard of test accommodations?

PROBE: Such as more time to take the test. Or, taking the test in a small group of students? Or, using a dictionary during the test?

Does your child use test accommodations? If so, do you know which ones?

Have you ever heard of test modifications?

Does your child use test modifications? If so, do you know which ones?

Q5) Do teachers ever talk about statewide testing during IEP team meetings? During your child's IEP team meeting, what do teachers say about statewide testing?

Do teachers ever talk about test accommodations at IEP team meetings? During your child's IEP team meeting, what things do teachers say about test accommodations?

Q6) Do teachers ever ask you questions about your culture so that they can understand (child's name) better?

PROBE: Do you have opportunities to share your culture with people at school?

Do teachers ever ask you questions about your language so that they can understand (child's name) better?

PROBE: Do (child's name) teachers know any (language) words?

Do teachers ever speak to you in your language (without an interpreter)?

Q7) Do you think you usually understand everything that teachers say to you through interpreters?

PROBE: Is an interpreter provided when you need one?

Do you think you usually understand everything that teachers write for you to read? If not, who helps you?

Q8) This is the last question! When you talk to other parents at school, do you usually talk to only those parents who speak your language?

PROBE: When you go to school activities, do you speak your language? English? Both languages?

Thank the family appropriately and share gift card!

Teacher Interview Protocol

Opening: My name is (name) from the University of Minnesota. I am one of the researchers who is working in (school name) this week to conduct a research study on how teachers can work better with families who speak a language other than English at home. When we are finished, I have a gift card for you as a thank you for helping us with our research study. Do you have any questions about what we are going to do?

It's often difficult for me to remember and write down your answer quickly, so this group interview will be recorded. Your name will not be on the tape and I will never use your name in anything that I do for the study. Thank you. Let's begin.

Q1) When are you able to communicate with parents of English language learners with disabilities?

PROBE: At school? In meetings? After or before school? On the telephone?

Do you usually call the parent? Or, do they call you first?

What, besides language, are some obstacles to communicating with parents?

Q2) Of the teachers for English language learners with disabilities, who typically talks to the parents?

PROBE: Do some teachers tend to talk to the parents more than others? Why?

What do you (and/or other teachers) communicate to the families about?

What are some effective techniques for communicating with parents of English language learners with disabilities?

Q3) Do you think that parents of English language learners with disabilities know about statewide assessments? If so, how do they learn about them?

PROBE: In the newspapers? From their child? From teachers at school? From friends or family members?

How do you approach this complex topic with parents of English language learners with disabilities?

Do they know what these tests are for?

What testing issues surface the most often when communicating with parents of English language learners with disabilities?

When are these tests talked about with parents? In preparation for testing? In explaining test results? During IEP team meetings?

What would help you in communicating this information?

Q4) Do you think that parents know what test accommodations are? If so, how do you know this?

PROBE: Could parents identify the test accommodations that their children use for taking tests?

Do you ever have to explain the difference between accommodations and modifications?

Do you think that parents know what test accommodations are for?

When are test accommodations talked about with parents?

Q5) What do you do to learn about your students' cultural backgrounds so that you can understand them better? What do you do to learn about your students' languages? What have you learned that helps you instruct your students?

PROBE: Do parents and students have opportunities to share their culture with you at school? With other people at school?

PROBE: Do any of the teachers communicate in languages other than English?

Q6) Do you think that you have adequate information about the family background of the English language learners with disabilities that you instruct?

PROBE: Do you know where they were born? How long they have been in U.S. schools? Whether they went to school in their native country? What language(s) is spoken in their homes? Proficiency in English? Proficiency in native language(s)? Literacy in English? Literacy in native language(s)?